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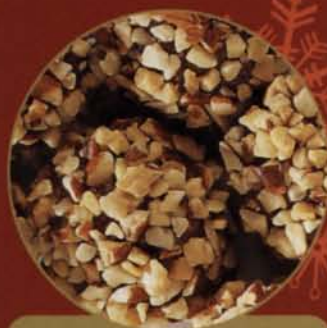


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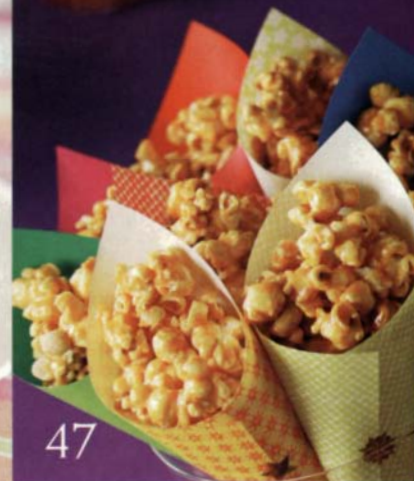
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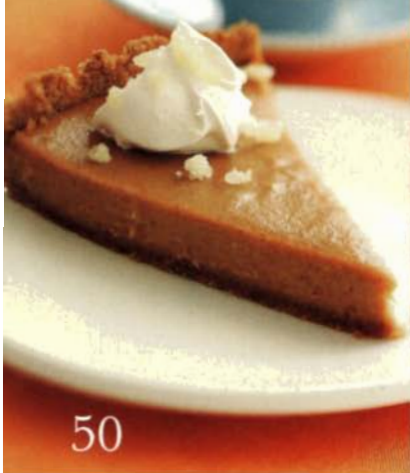


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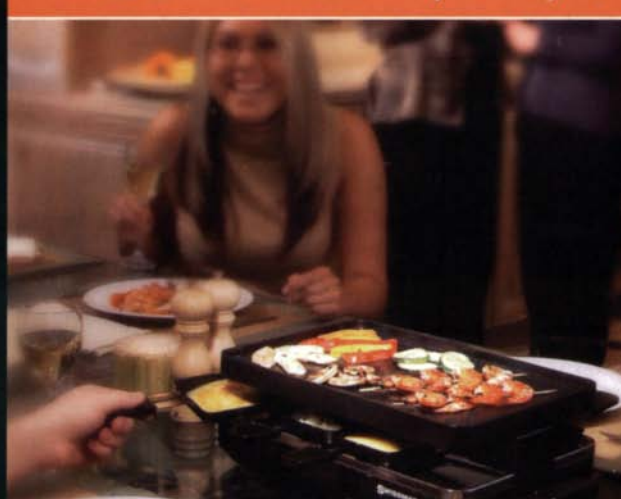
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“Aha!” moments in baking

We love putting together this special issue of Holiday Baking, and no, it's not because of all that cookie and cake tasting we do down at the test kitchen. (We'll admit though, we did get a little carried away with testing the caramel corn in this issue. The recipe worked great the first time, but it was so deliciously addicting that we tested it again...and again...just

to make sure, you know.) No, the reason it's so much fun to work on this issue is that we pick up a lot of little gems from our amazing baking authors. Sometimes we forget how much science is involved in baking, and how a little knowledge can make your results so much better and more consistent.

Fortunately, our authors are generous in sharing the secrets to success. Whether creating recipes for their latest cookbooks or developing bakery or restaurant desserts that need to turn out perfectly every day, these bakers have discovered what works, what doesn't, and why. By following their tips, you'll not only get tender scones, moist cakes, and pretty cookies, but you'll also get the sat-

isfaction of knowing why things turned out so well.

As a bit of a teaser, here are some of the tips you'll learn in the following pages, courtesy of our authors—Nancy Baggett, Joanne Chang, Karen DeMasco, Abigail Johnson Dodge, Alice Medrich, Nicole Rees, Carole Walter, and Carolyn Weil—and a few from our readers and our test kitchen, too.

❖ To keep logs of “slice-and-bake” cookie dough from flattening on one side as they chill, rest them in a trough made from a halved paper towel core.

❖ To keep cookies from spreading too much in the oven, be sure to use butter that's just soft enough to cream with sugar, but not so warm

that it melts the moment it gets in the oven; chilling dough also ensures cookies will keep their shape.

❖ Instead of a knife, use a bench scraper to cut bar cookies cleanly into neat pieces.

❖ Cookies will usually bake most evenly on unrimmed cookie sheets.

❖ To chill cookie dough faster, divide it into smaller portions and shape it into disks.

❖ To melt dark chocolate, you don't have to chop it finely; however it's best to finely chop white and milk chocolate so that it melts quickly; if it gets too hot, it can scorch or become gritty.

❖ To remove hardened caramel from a pot, pour in a little hot water and

(Continued on p. 10)



Cutout Cookies

Yields about 3½ dozen 2-inch cookies

As soon as I make these cookies, I freeze them. Wrap small batches in plastic, and put several batches in a larger plastic container to freeze. Pull one batch out as needed. They thaw in minutes.

9 ounces (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for rolling

1½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon kosher salt

6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, softened

¾ cup granulated sugar

1 large egg

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

2 tablespoons heavy cream

½ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest

In a small bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt to blend. Using a stand mixer or a hand-held mixer, beat the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until well creamed. Add the egg and beat until the mixture is light and fluffy. Add the vanilla, cream, and lemon zest and mix just until well combined. Reduce the speed to medium low and gradually add the flour mixture. Mix just until well combined. Portion the dough into thirds, shape each third into a disk, and wrap with plastic. Chill in the refrigerator until firm enough to roll out (or chill overnight).

When ready to bake, cover several baking sheets with parchment and heat the oven to 350°F. Flour a work surface and have extra flour ready. Working with one dough disk at a time, roll the dough

to ⅜ to ¼ inch thick, lightly flouring the pin, the dough, and the work surface as needed to prevent sticking. Using a variety of cookie cutters, cut shapes as close together as possible. Combine and reroll scraps as necessary. Using a thin metal spatula, transfer the cutouts to the baking sheet and decorate with sanding sugars or other decorations. Bake one sheet at a time until the edges of the cookies are just beginning to turn golden, 9 to 10 minutes. Watch carefully—the cookies should remain pale except for the golden edges, so you'll want to get them out of the oven before much browning happens. Let the cookies cool on racks. Store the cooled cookies, well wrapped in airtight containers, for a few days or in the freezer for several weeks.

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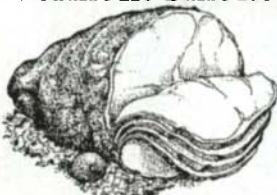


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gently warm the pot on the stove.

- ❖ To remove a tart ring from a tart pan, put the pan on top of a wide can and let the ring drop away.
- ❖ Baking soda helps your cookies have an open, irregular crumb; adding baking powder along with the baking soda helps to create a finer crumb.
- ❖ If you don't have a food processor, you can easily make crumbs for a cookie crust by putting the cookies in a zip-top bag and crushing them with a rolling pin.

A final tip:

Don't forget about the freezer. Holiday baking is a lot more fun when you can do it at your own convenience—not the night before you've promised to bring tins to all your friends and co-workers. At my house, we start making the cutout cookies on p. 8 (and a lot of other favorites) many weeks before the height of the season. We wrap the cookies in small batches and then put them in larger containers; that way, we can quickly pull out a few cookies when friends drop by. They stay crisp and fresh in the freezer, and they thaw in minutes.

—Susie Middleton, editor

Getting the most from a *Fine Cooking* recipe

Read carefully

Before you start, read the recipe from start to finish so there are no surprises.

Before you actually start to bake, gather all the necessary ingredients and equipment. Prepare the ingredients according to the directions in the ingredient list (see below for more on this).

To determine doneness, always rely first on the recipe's sensory descriptor, such as "bake until golden brown." Consider any times given in a recipe merely as a guide for when to start checking for doneness.

Watch the modifiers

A recipe ingredient list contains words like "diced" and "chopped" that tell you how to prepare each ingredient for the recipe, and the placement of these modifiers in the ingredient line is as important as the modi-

fier itself. Take for example these two similar lines that you may see in a recipe ingredient list:

- 1 cup rice, cooked
- 1 cup cooked rice

The first line is telling you to take 1 cup of rice and cook it; the second line is calling for 1 cup of rice that has already been cooked. The difference between the two is about 2 cups of cooked rice, and that can make a big difference in the outcome of a recipe.

Know the ingredients

Unless otherwise noted, assume:

- ❖ butter is unsalted;
- ❖ eggs are large (about 2 ounces each);
- ❖ flour is unbleached all-purpose (don't sift unless directed);
- ❖ sugar is granulated;
- ❖ salt is table salt; if the recipe calls for kosher salt (which is coarser than table salt) and you only have table salt, use a bit less of it.

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Nicole Rees ("Simple Snack Cakes," p. 42, "Food Science," p. 32) is a cake wizard and all-around baking expert, which made her the perfect person to answer all of our cookie questions. She's the co-author of *Understanding Baking*, a book on the science and technique of baking, as well as its companion recipe book, *The Baker's Manual*. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

After earning a culinary degree in 1994, **Karen DeMasco** ("Caramel Popcorn," p. 47) trained in the pastry kitchens of several top New York City restaurants, including

Gramercy Tavern, where she worked under Claudia Fleming. In 2001, chef Tom Colicchio tapped Karen to become pastry chef of his restaurant Craft, and she's now in charge of desserts at Craftbar and 'wichcraft as well. Karen's technique is refined by years of classical training, but she likes to keep things simple—and her simply delightful caramel popcorn is a case in point: "It may seem out of context in a fine dining atmosphere, but its crunch and buttery caramel flavor stand up to any traditional petit four."

Abigail Johnson Dodge ("Stylish Tarts," p. 50, and "Bar Cookies," p. 62) is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, and she was the founding director of the magazine's test kitchen. Her brand-new book, *The Weekend Baker*, is just out from W. W. Norton and is already receiving raves and accolades. Abby's other cookbooks include *Great Fruit Desserts*, *The Kid's Cookbook*, *Kids' Baking*, and Williams-Sonoma's *Dessert*. Abby also wrote the New England and mid-Atlantic portions of *Savoring America*, which was nominated for a James Beard award in 2003.

Carole Walter ("Slice & Bake Cookies," p. 55) has taught baking across the United States for more than 25 years. She has written three award-winning cookbooks, *Great Cakes*, *Great Pies & Tarts*, and *Great Cookies*, all published by Clarkson Potter. Carole studied pastry in Austria, Denmark, France, and Italy, as well as in the U.S. She is a charter member of the International Association of Culinary Professionals (IACP), a founding member of The Bakers Dozen East, and a member of the New York chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier.

Chocolate guru **Alice Medrich** ("Warm Chocolate Soufflé Cakes," p. 66) has written several award-winning books on her favorite food.

Her most recent, *Bittersweet: Recipes and Tales from a Life in Chocolate*, won the IACP Cookbook of the Year. It features sections on substituting high percentage chocolates in recipes, using chocolate in savory dishes, and tasting chocolate to find the ones you prefer. In addition to writing about chocolate, Alice consults and teaches. She lives in Berkeley, California.

Nancy Baggett ("A Sensational European Pairing," p. 16) first discovered the spectacular combination of chocolate and hazelnuts while living in Germany in the late 1970s and early '80s. Today, she's based in Ellicott City, Maryland, where she works as a cookbook author and food journalist. Nancy is the author of *The International Cookie Cookbook*, as well as two IACP award-winning cookbooks, *The International Chocolate Cookbook* and *The All-American Cookie Book*.

Carolyn Weil ("Baking with Buttermilk" p. 22) has worked in the food business for more than 30 years. She was the first pastry chef at Stars restaurant in San Francisco, she opened The Bakeshop, in Berkeley, and she is a founding member of The Bakers Dozen, a renowned group of bakers who collaborate on baking research. She now focuses on making baking accessible for home cooks by giving classes and writing articles and books. She contributed to *The Bakers Dozen Cookbook* and wrote *Pie & Tart* for Williams-Sonoma.

Joanne Chang ("Classic Cookies," p. 86D) is a pro at making cookies; she's constantly turning them out at Boston's Flour Bakery & Café, where she's the chef-owner. Before opening Flour, Joanne worked at Rialto, Payard Pâtisserie, and Mistral. Joanne is also an avid marathon runner—this year, she ran her fourteenth Boston race.



Nicole Rees



Karen DeMasco



Abigail Johnson Dodge



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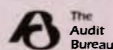
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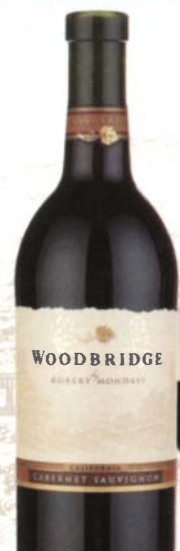
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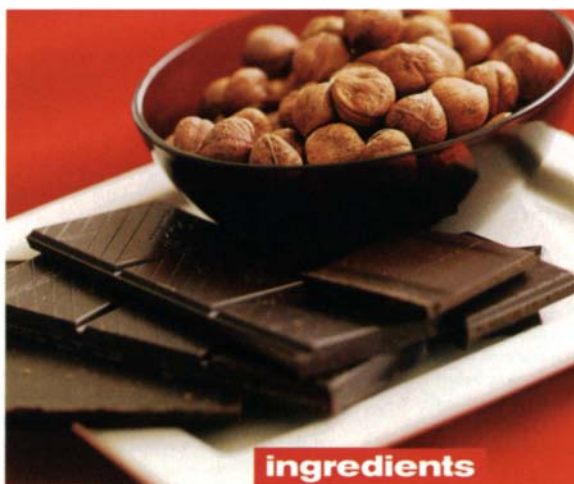
The rich flavors of chocolate and hazelnut make a classic cookie



BY NANCY BAGGETT

Although our traditional American holiday repertoire lacks chocolate cookies, I found many while living in Europe, where each region has its own unique holiday specialties. Most of my favorites come from Germany, Austria, Italy, and Switzerland, and their chocolate cookies often include hazelnuts. The sophisticated chocolate-glazed chocolate and hazelnut cookies on p. 18 are proof of just how appealing this flavor pairing can be. Inspired by several German recipes and a Swiss cookie called *Brunzli*, these cookies are rich and bittersweet, not only from dark chocolate and cocoa powder, but from espresso powder, which deepens and enriches the other flavors.

You can use semisweet or bitter-sweet chocolate in this recipe, although many brands of semisweet chocolate will produce a slightly milder, sweeter cookie, and some extra-bittersweet chocolates will yield an intensely bittersweet result. The overall flavor of the cookies depends greatly on the chocolate, so choose one that suits your taste. Don't use unsweetened chocolate, however; it's too bitter.



ingredients

Chocolate and hazelnuts

Throughout Europe, chocolate and hazelnuts are a classic pair. The combination appears frequently in Italian cakes, in various frozen desserts called *semifreddo*, and in a hazelnut-chocolate confection known as *gianduia*. *Gianduia* originated in Italy, but it's enormously popular throughout Switzerland, Germany, and Austria as well, turning up in an array of bonbons, truffles, and other candies. The Swiss, Germans, and Austrians also use chocolate and chopped or ground hazelnuts in all sorts of tortes, puddings, pastries, and cookies like the chocolate-glazed ones on p. 18.

TIP: I decorate these cookies by dipping them into melted chocolate. Usually, pure chocolate must be tempered in order for it to set and stay smooth-looking. But since I store the finished cookies in the refrigerator, I skip the time-consuming task of tempering.

(World Cuisines continues on p. 18)



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To glaze, just tilt, dip, and scrape



With the bowl tipped so that the chocolate pools on one side, hold a cookie vertically and dip until half is submerged in the chocolate. Lift the cookie out and shake off excess chocolate. Gently scrape the bottom of the cookie against the side of the bowl to remove excess chocolate from the bottom surface.



Arrange the dipped cookies on the foil-lined sheets, spacing them slightly apart. When a pan is full, refrigerate it for 30 minutes so the chocolate can firm up. Then peel the cookies from the foil, pack them in airtight containers, and return them to the refrigerator.

Chocolate Glaze

Yields enough to coat at least one batch of cookies.

16 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate (not unsweetened), broken up or coarsely chopped
1 tablespoon corn oil or other flavorless vegetable oil

Line several small trays or baking sheets with aluminum foil. Combine the chocolate and oil in a medium metal bowl. Set the bowl over a saucepan containing about an inch of barely simmering water and stir with a spatula until melted. Turn off the burner under the saucepan but leave the bowl over the hot water to keep the chocolate warm; stir the chocolate occasionally. (Replace the water in the pan with hot water as it cools off during the dipping process, but be careful not to splash water into the chocolate.)

To glaze the cookies:

Working with only about five or six cookies at a time (keep the remainder frozen), dip the cookies in the chocolate glaze, as shown at left.

Storage:

The cookies will keep, refrigerated, for up to five days. Remove them from the refrigerator about 10 minutes before serving; if the cookies stand unrefrigerated for longer than about an hour, the chocolate surface may begin to dull.

Chocolate-Glazed Chocolate-Hazelnut Cookies

*Yields 75 to 85
 2¾- to 3-inch cookies.*

5 ounces (1 cup) whole hazelnuts, toasted
1½ teaspoons instant espresso powder
3 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate (not unsweetened), broken up or coarsely chopped
5½ ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, slightly softened
¾ cup granulated sugar
1½ ounces (⅓ cup) unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder
1 large egg
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon table salt
8¼ ounces (1¾ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
Butter or nonstick spray for the baking sheets
Chocolate Glaze (at left)

In a food processor, process the hazelnuts and espresso powder until they're ground to the consistency of a nut butter, 2 to 3 minutes.

Melt the chocolate in a microwave or on the stove (see p. 70 for details). Set aside to cool until warm.

In a large bowl, beat the butter, sugar, cocoa powder, and hazelnut mixture with a stand mixer (use the paddle attachment) or a hand-held mixer on medium speed until very well blended and fluffy, 1½ to 2 minutes; scrape the bowl as needed. Add the egg, vanilla, and salt; beat until completely blended and smooth, about 1½ minutes. On low speed, mix in half of the flour and then the melted chocolate just until evenly incorporated. Mix or stir in by hand the remaining flour until evenly incorporated. Set aside for 10 minutes; the dough will firm up slightly.

Cut the dough into thirds. Set each third between sheets of parchment or

waxed paper. Roll out each portion to ⅛ inch thick; check the underside and smooth any wrinkles. Stack the rolled pieces (paper still attached) on a tray. Refrigerate until firm, about 45 minutes, or for several hours (or freeze for about 20 minutes to speed chilling).

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter several large baking sheets or coat with nonstick spray. Working with one piece of dough at a time and keeping the remainder chilled, gently peel away and then replace the top sheet of paper. Flip the dough over. Peel off and discard the second sheet of paper. Cut out the cookies using a 2½- to 2¾-inch fluted round, oval, or other cutter. (If the dough softens too much to handle easily, transfer the paper and cookies to a tray, and refrigerate until firm again.) Using a spatula, carefully transfer the cookies to the baking sheets, arranging them about 1½ inches apart. Re-roll the dough scraps. Continue cutting out the cookies until all dough is used; refrigerate as necessary if it becomes too soft to handle.

Bake the cookies one sheet at a time (keep the rest refrigerated) until they feel dry and almost firm when pressed in the center, 7 to 10 minutes. Let cool on the sheets for 3 or 4 minutes before transferring to racks to cool completely. Prepare the cookies for glazing by freezing them for at least 20 minutes or up to several hours. (You can also freeze the cookies at this point, tightly wrapped, for up to two months.) To glaze the cookies, follow the directions at left.

Nancy Baggett is the author of The International Cookie Cookbook and The All-American Cookie Book. ♦

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Sugars in stylish hues

We were enticed by the sophisticated color palette of these decorating sugars, which come in shades like marigold, raspberry, periwinkle, and sunflower. The secret to their elegant hues? They're created with vegetable juices and other natural colorants, instead of artificial dyes. *India Tree Nature's Colors decorating sugars*, \$3.99 to \$4.99 for 3.5-ounce jars, at ChefShop.com (877-337-2491).

Baker's Pantry

BY REBECCA FREEDMAN

Let these ingredients and tools inspire you to bake up a storm



Deeper, darker cocoa powder

We put this black cocoa to the test by adding it to brownie recipes, and we were impressed by the results. The cocoa produced an exceptionally dark, chocolatey color and a deep, rich flavor. Be sure to use black cocoa in combination with natural or Dutch-processed cocoa; using the black version solo will flavor your cakes and cookies too strongly. *Black cocoa powder*, \$5.50 for 1 pound, at King Arthur Flour's Baker's Catalogue (800-827-6836; bakerscatalogue.com).

Chocolate "chips" with a twist

To give your chocolate-chip cookies a special twist, try baking with one of the extraordinarily delicious specialty chips available by mail. We love (from left) Callebaut's smooth, semisweet callets;

Valrhona's tiny, delicate, semisweet chocolate pearls; and Dagoba's organic bittersweet choco drops. *Callebaut semisweet callets* (2.2 pounds for \$18.75); *Valrhona "Les Perles" chocolate drops*

(2.2 pounds for \$18.95); and *Dagoba organic choco drops* (8 ounces for \$7.35 or a six-pack for \$39.90), all available at Chocosphere (www.chocosphere.com; 877-992-4626).





A chillable rolling pin

This sleek aluminum rolling pin is meant to chill in the fridge; just pop it in for about 15 minutes before using. The cold metal makes it much easier to roll out even very sticky dough. The pin is also relatively small and thin, so it not only fits in the refrigerator but is easy to store in a cabinet, too. *The Pin*, \$34.95, at ChefStation.com (866-448-8324).



Double-edged cookie cutters

We like the convenient two-in-one design of these cutters:

With one straight and one fluted edge, each cutter can yield two different cookie shapes. The set of five includes 1½-, 2-, 2¼-, 2¾-, and 3-inch round cutters. *Set of five double cutters*, \$22.95 at Kitchenconservatory.com (866-862-2433).



An extract infuses chocolate flavor

For a change of pace, use this chocolate extract to add a hint of chocolate flavor to whipped cream, or incorporate the extract into a basic crème anglaise recipe, like the one in *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 72. We also added the extract to a batter, and while it didn't strongly enhance the chocolate flavor, we did notice a subtle boost. *Star Kay White chocolate extract*, 8 ounces for \$12, at Dean & DeLuca (deandeluca.com; 877-826-9246).

What to read next: Sweet new baking books

Pure Chocolate by Fran Bigelow

Whether you want to learn how to taste chocolate, decipher those squiggles atop candies, or make all manner of sinful desserts and sweets, you'll love Seattle chocolatier Fran Bigelow's new book. In it, she reveals the magic behind her addictive creations (yes, you can order them by mail) and shares 75 accessible recipes, many of them dangerously easy to make. (*Broadway Books*, \$35.)

The King Arthur Flour Cookie Companion

The expert bakers at King Arthur Flour draw on their vast experience in this excellent follow-up to last year's *Baker's Companion*. The authors illuminate eight essential cookies (and offer many iterations of each), along with full chapters on drop, roll-out, shaped, batter, bar, and no-bake cookies. Sidebars, shortcuts, and helpful illustrations elevate recipes to mini baking lessons. (*Countryman Press*; \$29.95.)

Pie by Ken Haedrich

Pie makes the world a better place, and that's reason enough to love this comprehensive tome. But the straight-talking Ken Haedrich gives us more reasons than that: confidence-bolstering advice, techniques that really work, infectious enthusiasm, and 300 mouthwatering recipes for every season. A must-have for bakers of every ilk. (*Harvard Common Press*; hardcover \$37.95; softcover \$24.95.)

—Kimberly Y. Masibay



For Tang and Tenderness, Bake with Buttermilk

Why buttermilk makes
better pancakes,
biscuits, pound cakes,
scones, and more

BY CAROLYN WEIL

If you want pancakes that rise and rise and rise on the griddle, use buttermilk. If you want biscuits that are rich and flaky, make them with buttermilk. For pound cake with a moist crumb and a tangy edge, choose buttermilk. What's the one ingredient with an almost magical ability to improve muffins, quick breads, scones, and more? You guessed it: Buttermilk!

Buttermilk owes its success as a baking ingredient to its acidity. It's not nearly as sour as lemon juice or vinegar, of course, but the milder lactic acid present in buttermilk makes it a real boon to bakers. A slightly acidic batter helps keep baked goods moist and tender by breaking down

long, tough strands of gluten; it also prevents cherries and walnuts from acquiring a blue tinge in muffins. The tartness of buttermilk adds a pleasing, subtle tang to cakes and pastries. And the acid is responsible for buttermilk's thick consistency, which adds a soft, rich, creamy quality to whatever you're baking.

Although you probably don't think of it in this way, buttermilk contributes to the leavening of many baked goods. In conjunction with baking soda, buttermilk produces carbon dioxide gas, which is why a stack of pancakes made with buttermilk can tower over those made with milk. In fact, before baking powder was invented, butter-

(Continued on p. 24)

Buttermilk Pancakes

Yields twelve to fourteen 4-inch pancakes; serves two to three.

These have become a weekend breakfast staple in our house, and they're so easy to make that they show up on weekdays occasionally, too. I use oil instead of melted butter in pancake batter because I don't like the way melted butter congeals when it meets cold eggs and buttermilk. This recipe can easily be doubled or tripled.

4½ ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 large egg
1 tablespoon canola or safflower oil; more for the griddle
1 cup buttermilk
Pure maple syrup or fruit jam

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, and salt until well blended. Add the egg, oil, and buttermilk and whisk only until no dry flour is visible; the batter should be lumpy. Heat a griddle over medium heat until a sprinkle of water sizzles gently across the surface. Lightly oil the surface and drop the batter by generous tablespoons about 2 inches apart onto the griddle. Cook each pancake until the bottom is golden brown, tiny bubbles appear around the edges, and the edges look dry. Flip and cook until the center of each pancake rises and is firm when poked in the center and the bottom is golden. Serve immediately on warmed plates with syrup or jam.



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milk was the home cook's trusty baking companion. Baking soda was the only game in town, and it needed an acidic ingredient to help activate it and balance its flavor. Buttermilk came to the rescue.

And it's still my savior in the kitchen. Having a quart of buttermilk in the fridge allows me to whip together a quick batch of scones whenever the mood strikes. I know that one complaint with this ingredient is having a half-empty carton leftover, but I never have that problem as there are plenty of ways to use it beyond baking (see the box on p. 28). In my family, we even drink it, blended with fresh fruit and sugar, for a quick, tangy smoothie.

At the supermarket, you'll see buttermilk labeled with various percentages of milkfat: $\frac{1}{2}$, 1, or $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent. For baking, they're essentially interchangeable.



Cheddar & Chive Buttermilk Biscuits

Yields 9 biscuits.

Served warm, these cheesy biscuits are a perfect companion to a bowl of soup on a chilly night. Parmesan or Swiss may be substituted for the Cheddar and scallion for the chives.

9 ounces (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon table salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ pound ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup thinly sliced fresh chives
3 ounces extra-sharp Cheddar, grated to yield $\frac{3}{4}$ cup
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup buttermilk

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment.

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt until well blended. With a pastry blender or two table knives, cut the butter into the flour



mixture until its texture is fine and looks a little like cornmeal, with some butter chunks the size of peas. Stir in the chives and grated cheese. Add the buttermilk and stir with a wooden spoon until the dough is wet, sticky, and shaggy; small areas of dry ingredients are fine. Turn the dough out on to an unfloured board and knead about 12 times until the dough comes together and is smooth. Lightly flour the board and pat the dough into a 1-inch-thick square. Use a sharp knife to trim the edges of the square; this helps the biscuits rise. Cut the square into nine smaller squares. Transfer the biscuits to the lined baking sheet. Bake until firm and lightly golden brown on top and golden brown on bottom, 18 to 23 minutes.

What exactly is buttermilk?

Originally, buttermilk was the milky liquid that remained after churning cream into butter. But the product that we use today is made in a different way, more akin to yogurt. Skim milk or low-fat milk is heated with active cultures (in other words, good bacteria), and these cultures convert some of the sugar in the milk (the

lactose) into lactic acid. Under acidic conditions, milk proteins are not as soluble and they precipitate out, causing what's known as clabbering—an old-fashioned term for the thickening of milk. It's the lactic acid that causes both tartness and thickness, which are classic characteristics of buttermilk.

(Ingredient continues on p. 26)

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Sour Cherry & Walnut Scones

Yields 8 scones.

These scones have a fine, tender crumb because of the cake flour and lack of kneading. The dusting of cinnamon sugar complements the tartness of the cherries.

- ¼ cup plus 3 tablespoons granulated sugar**
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- 4½ ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 4 ounces (1 cup) cake flour**
- 2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest**
- ½ teaspoon baking soda**
- ¼ pound (½ cup) cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes**
- 4½ ounces (¾ cup) dried tart cherries**
- 2 ounces (½ cup) walnuts, coarsely chopped**
- ⅔ cup buttermilk**

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment. In a small bowl, mix 3 tablespoons of the sugar with the cinnamon.

In a large bowl, whisk the two flours, the remaining ¼ cup sugar, the baking powder, orange zest, and baking soda until well blended. Cut the butter cubes into the flour mixture with a pastry blender (or two table knives) until the mixture looks like cornmeal with a few butter lumps no larger than peas. Stir in the cherries and walnuts. Add the buttermilk and stir just until no dry flour is visible; the dough will be wet and sticky.

Turn the dough out on to a lightly floured board and pat into a 1-inch-thick round. Cut into eight wedges. With a spatula, transfer the wedges to the baking sheet, spacing them about 2 inches apart. Sprinkle the cinnamon sugar over the scones. Bake until the tops of the scones are firm to the touch and the edges and bottoms are lightly golden brown, 18 to 20 minutes. Let cool on a rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.

In a pinch, try dried buttermilk...

Powdered buttermilk is an option for baking. Unlike today's liquid buttermilk, the dried form is actually made from the liquid that's left after churning butter. This liquid is cultured and the water is evaporated, leaving a dried powder. Many supermarkets carry this product, made by Saco, in the baking section. (You can also order it; see p. 82.)



Powdered buttermilk can't be reconstituted into liquid buttermilk, but it does work well for baking. Add the powder to the dry ingredients, and add water to the wet ingredients. (The package provides exact proportions.) I give liquid buttermilk an edge over powdered when it comes to the texture and flavor of baked goods, but the dry product does have its place in the baker's pantry. One big advantage is that it lasts a very long time—up to several years—as long as it's refrigerated after opening.

...or make faux buttermilk

An easy way to make a quick buttermilk substitute is to add 1 tablespoon white vinegar or lemon juice to 1 cup whole milk and let it stand for 10 minutes. This "sour milk" can pinch-hit for buttermilk in most baked goods. (Don't try using truly soured milk, which is milk that has spoiled and has an unpleasant flavor.) It will provide the acid for leavening and tenderizing, though the flavor won't be as tangy or as pleasing as you get with regular buttermilk.

Yogurt also works

I've used plain low-fat or whole-milk yogurt in recipes when I've come up short on buttermilk, and it works fine.

(Ingredient continues on p. 28)

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Cranberry Streusel Pound Cake

Yields one 8½-inch loaf; serves ten.

This tender loaf is perfect for brunch or as a treat with a cup of tea. The loaf can be wrapped well and stored in the refrigerator for up to a week or in the freezer up to a month.

Nonstick cooking spray or butter for the pan
Flour for the pan

FOR THE STREUSEL:

¼ cup walnut pieces (about 1 ounce)
2 tablespoons light or dark brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon

FOR THE CAKE:

6¾ ounces (1½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
¼ pound (½ cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
2 large eggs, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ cup buttermilk
2¾ ounces (½ cup) dried cranberries, lightly chopped

FOR THE ICING:

¼ cup confectioners' sugar
2 teaspoons heavy cream; more if needed
⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Grease an 8½x4½-inch loaf pan with nonstick cooking spray or butter and dust with flour; tap out any excess.

Make the streusel: Put the walnuts, brown sugar, and cinnamon in a food processor. Process with short bursts until the walnuts are chopped into small pieces.

Make the cake: In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, salt, and orange zest until well blended. With an electric mixer (I use the paddle attachment on my stand mixer), beat the butter on medium speed until smooth, about 1 minute. Sprinkle in the sugar and beat well until slightly fluffy, about 2 minutes, scraping the bowl well. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each addition. Beat in the vanilla. With the mixer on low, add about a third of the flour mixture and mix until almost combined; add half of the buttermilk and mix again until just combined. Repeat with another third of the flour, the last half of the buttermilk, and then the remaining flour, mixing each time until just combined. Stir in the dried cranberries with a rubber spatula.

With the spatula, spread half of the batter into the loaf pan and sprinkle evenly with the walnut streusel. Spread on the remaining batter. Bake until the loaf is golden brown and a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean, 60 to 75 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a rack for 10 minutes, turn out of the pan, and let cool completely on the rack.

Make the icing: In a small bowl, mix the confectioners' sugar, cream, and cinnamon with a small spoon until there are no lumps. The icing should drizzle smoothly in a thin line from the tip of the spoon; you may need to add up to another 1 teaspoon cream. Drizzle the icing over the cake in thin parallel lines and let set for about 15 minutes before serving. Slice gently with a serrated knife.

Carolyn Weil, a contributor to The Baker's Dozen Cookbook and the author of Williams-Sonoma's Pie & Tart, teaches and writes about baking. ♦

Beyond baking



I use buttermilk so often that it has a permanent spot on my weekly shopping list. But if you're looking for easy ways to use up the quart, here are a few:

Ranch dressing: Whisk 1 cup buttermilk with

⅔ cup mayonnaise, 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard, 1 teaspoon minced garlic, and 1 tablespoon each of minced fresh dill, minced fresh parsley, and grated onion. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Mashed potatoes: Substitute buttermilk for regular milk.

Vegetable soups: Swirl a little buttermilk into a bowl of puréed soup for a bit of tang.

Fried chicken: Soak chicken pieces in buttermilk before coating with breadcrumbs and frying. The acidity in buttermilk makes the meat extra tender—and tangy, too.

Fruit desserts: Instead of topping a dish of peaches or berries with crème fraîche or whipped cream, try using a little buttermilk mixed with sugar as a low-fat alternative.

How long does buttermilk last?

Because of its acidity, which inhibits bacterial growth, buttermilk has good staying power. A fresh carton will last for three or four weeks. You'll know it has gone bad if the texture is grainy and it smells off. Always shake the carton before using because the milk solids tend to settle. If you have extra buttermilk but don't plan on using it up in that time, you can freeze it for up to six months. Keep in mind that it will separate when it's thawed, and even after mixing it, the texture won't be the same.

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Questions for the Cookie Doctor BY NICOLE REES

What's the significance of sifting? Why are my cookies soft instead of crisp? Can I use year-old baking powder? These are pressing concerns for any baker, and as a baking expert, I'm often asked these sorts of questions, particularly at this time of year. So before your annual holiday baking marathon, take a moment to read my diagnoses of common cookie ailments, and my answers to common questions about ingredients and processes.

question: I always use the same recipe for my chocolate-chip cookies, but sometimes they turn out soft and chewy, and other times they're crisp and flat. Why?

answer: In chocolate-chip cookies, as in all cookies, the chemistry of each ingredient has a huge effect on the end result, so several factors could contribute to your inconsistent results. But I can probably diagnose your cookie's ailment by asking you three questions:

Are you positive you use the same amount of flour in every batch? Are your ingredients at the same temperature every time? Do you always use the exact same ingredients?

The number-one reason cookies differ from batch to batch is inconsistent measuring of the flour. Depending on how lightly you spoon the flour into it, a 1-cup dry measure holds anywhere from 4 to 5 ounces of flour. In baking, that's a huge difference. If you have a

kitchen scale and you're game for a little experiment, start weighing your cups of flour to see how consistent (or inconsistent) they are.

If you're certain that every batch contains the same amount of flour *by weight* and your results are still inconsistent, consider the temperature of your ingredients. If your butter is warm and extremely soft when you make the dough, the fat will quickly melt in the heat of the oven, and the cookies will spread. If you begin with cooler, firmer butter, the cookies' edges have a chance to set before the fat melts, and your cookies won't spread so much.

Using the exact same ingredients every time can also help you get consistent results. Find brands you like and stick with them. (With flour, however, there's a little bit of variability from bag to bag, even within the same type and brand.)

Using extra-large or jumbo eggs in a recipe that calls for large eggs can also cause cookies to spread (due to added water from the white) or even rise (due to extra fat and emulsifiers from the yolk).

question: Is it necessary to sift dry ingredients?

answer: In some recipes, you can just whisk the dry ingredients together and still get decent results, but I think it's a good idea to get in the habit of sifting. Here's why: First, sifting aerates flour and gives a more uniform texture, helping you measure it consistently and get more reliable results from your recipes. (In batters, aerated flour may also contribute to volume.) Second, sifting breaks up stubborn lumps in ingredients like cocoa powder and baking soda. And third, sifting dry ingredients together helps them disperse evenly into the dough. This is especially important in recipes that call for mixing dry ingredients into the dough or batter only briefly—pancakes, for example, and many types of cookies.

question: One of my favorite cookie recipes calls for light brown sugar. Can I use dark brown sugar instead?

answer: You can, just don't be surprised if your favorite cookies don't turn out the same. As I mentioned at far left, using exactly the same ingredients every time you make a recipe is the secret to consistent results. A seemingly small substitution, like switching from light brown sugar to dark brown sugar, might increase cookie spread or cause your cookies to be softer because dark brown sugar contains more moisture from the added molasses. (Commercial brown sugar is made by blending a small amount of molasses with fine granulated sugar.) You'll probably taste the difference, too.

question: What will happen if I substitute margarine or shortening for butter in a cookie recipe?

answer: In most well-written recipes, the fat was carefully chosen for the attributes it contributes to the finished cookie. So making a substitution might not be the best idea. But that doesn't mean it's impossible. For example, there's no substitute for the flavor of butter, but you can replace butter with stick margarine. Like butter, stick margarine is 6% to 10% water and performs similarly to butter in recipes. There's no water in shortening; it's pure fat, lightened with air. So if you replace butter with an equal amount of shortening, your cookies may not spread as much due to the lower water content and the fact that shortening melts at a higher temperature than butter, giving cookies time to set in the oven and retain their height. Also, your cookies might look paler (not necessarily a bad thing—sugar cookies you'll decorate actually benefit from a blond color) because the milk solids present in butter contain protein and sugar, which help cause browning.

(Food Science continues on p. 34)

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question: I have an old sugar cookie recipe that calls for cream of tartar in addition to baking soda. Why?

answer: Cream of tartar, also known as potassium acid tartrate, is a purified form of an acid that forms on casks during the wine-making process. It has several functions in the kitchen, from stabilizing beaten egg whites to preventing sugar crystallization in candy, and in older recipes, cream of tartar (an acid) is used in conjunction with baking soda (a base) to leaven cakes and cookies. Essentially, when you use cream of tartar with baking soda, you're making your own baking powder.

question: I don't bake much outside of the holiday season. Is it all right to use year-old dry ingredients?

answer: Sugar and salt last indefinitely, so no problem there. But flour and leavens are another matter. If your white flour is more than eight months old, consider replacing it unless storage conditions in your home are unusually ideal. For example, I store flour in airtight containers and leave them in the basement, where the temperature hovers at 60°F year-round. This cool, dry, dark environment preserves freshness for a year.

Whole-grain flours deteriorate more quickly than white flour because they're milled with the

germ intact, which contains fat. This fat can go rancid under certain conditions. At room temperature, whole-grain flours lose their freshness after two to three months. You can count on six months if you refrigerate the flour in airtight containers; up to a year in your freezer.

Leavens' appearance, odor, and flavor don't change with age, so it's hard to gauge their freshness and strength. Warm, humid air can activate baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) and diminish its potency, so as a rule replace it every six months—more often if you live in a warm, humid climate. Baking powder, which contains sodium bicarbonate and at least one acid salt, can last a year or more, if sealed between uses.

question: Leavens help cakes rise to great heights in the oven. But cookies don't really rise, so why do we add baking powder, baking soda, or both to the dough?

answer: Leavens affect the volume *and* texture of most cookies. While you might not necessarily be looking for lofty cookies, you do want a pleasant texture and color. In addition to giving cookies an open, irregular crumb, the alkalinity of baking soda helps cookies become golden brown. Adding baking powder in addition to baking soda reduces browning and creates a finer crumb.

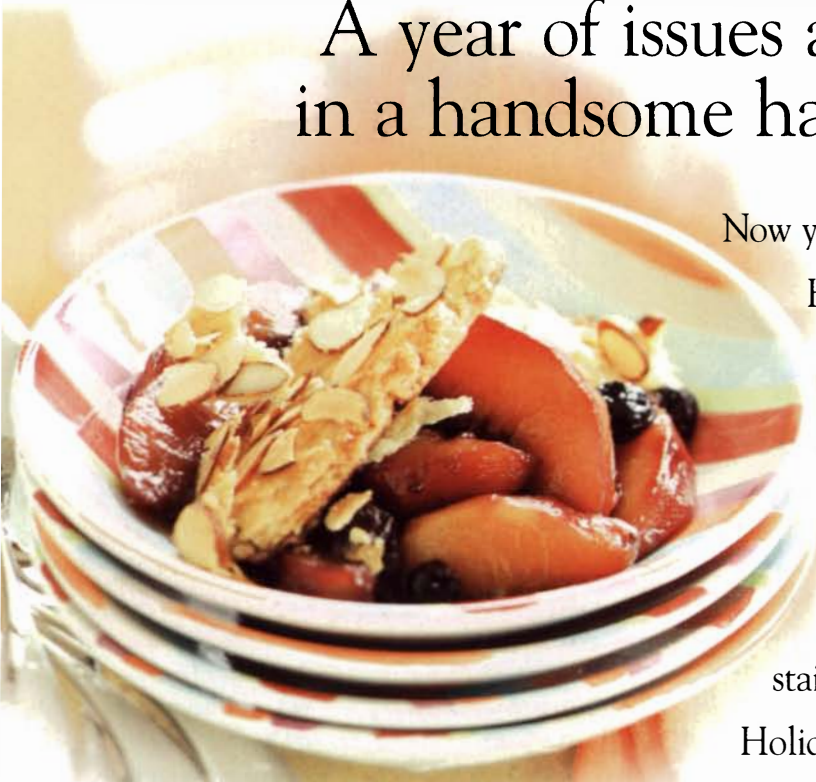
question: Why do some cookie recipes call for chilling the dough before baking?

answer: Chilling firms up the fats in the dough, which helps cutout and slice-and-bake cookies hold their shape during baking. Chilling also keeps slice-and-bake cookie dough from flattening on the bottom as you press down with your knife.

Baker Nicole Rees works as a food technologist in Portland, Oregon. ♦

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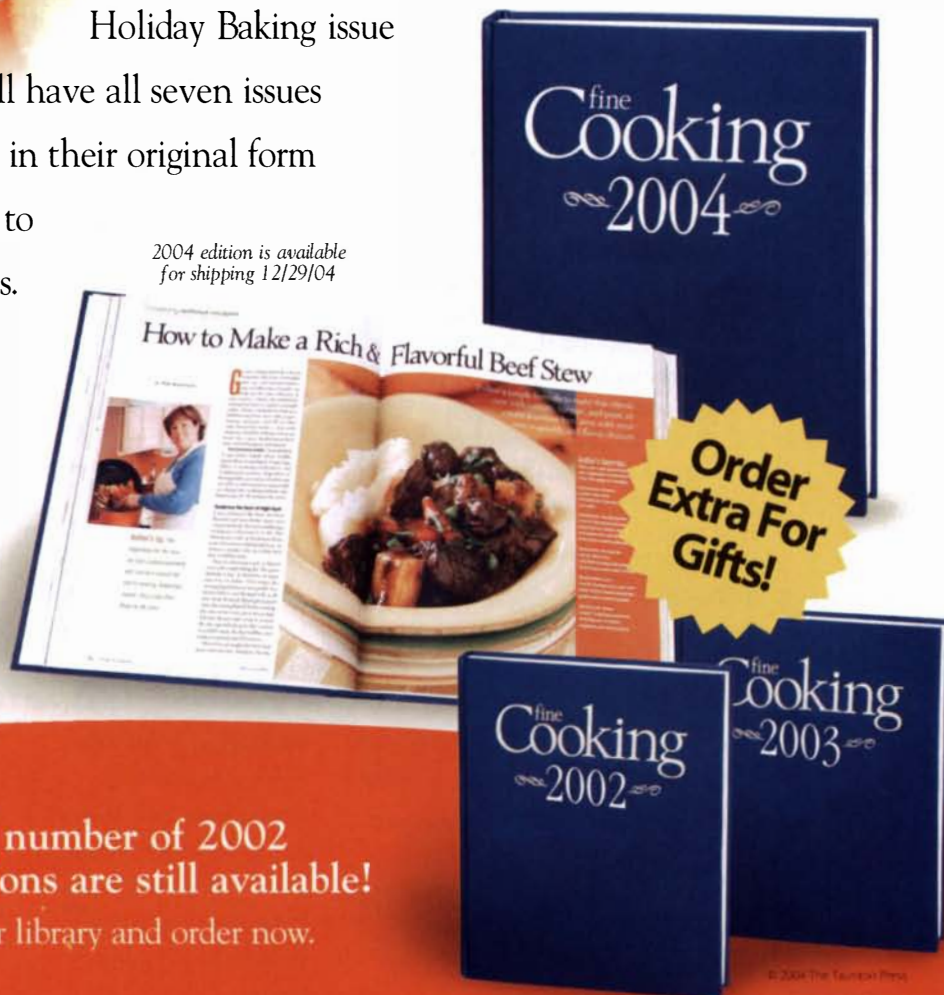
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Today's new stand mixers

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

You certainly don't need a stand mixer to whip cream or egg whites, knead bread doughs, or simply cream butter and sugar for cookie doughs, but having one makes all those tasks so much easier. Much more efficient than a hand mixer, a stand mixer leaves your hands free to add ingredients, start the next step of the recipe, clean up a bit, etc. And, as it happens, now may be one of the best times to invest in a stand mixer.

Within the past couple of years, a number of kitchen appliance manufacturers have elbowed their way into the stand mixer market—a market that has long been dominated by the KitchenAid (which, in turn, has recently revamped its line of mixers). We couldn't contain our curiosity about all of these options. Could any of these new contenders rattle the KitchenAid? After running ten machines through a series of tests, we found three respectable alternatives to the KitchenAid, though the icon held its own against them all. For the best mixer to suit your needs—and your budget—see our recommendations, starting at right.

HOW WE TESTED

For this review, we limited the testing to stand mixers under \$500.

Within this parameter, we selected nationally available brands. If more than one model was available within a brand, we chose the one that seemed most relevant to the home cook in terms of features,

capacity, and price. Each mixer was evaluated for its performance on the following tests:

- ❖ whipping cream
- ❖ whipping egg whites
- ❖ creaming butter and sugar
- ❖ mixing single and double batches of gingerbread cookie dough

❖ kneading a large batch of bread dough (requiring 6½ cups flour to yield four baguettes).

While many mixers now come with an array of attachments (mostly sold separately), such as meat grinders and blender jars, these were not tested or considered for this review.

Whether you're a first-time buyer or looking to upgrade, now's a good time to invest in a stand mixer.



Best all-around

KitchenAid Professional 5 Plus

Average price: \$299.99

Capacity: 5 quarts (also available in 6 quarts)

Comes with a flat beater, dough hook, and whisk

What we love: A new wide-mouthed bowl makes it easier to add ingredients and scrape the bowl's sides without brushing your hand against a batter-coated beater. The initial stir speed is slow enough to keep dry ingredients from flying out of the bowl upon startup. This model was noticeably efficient at creaming butter and sugar and hardly needed to be stopped to scrape the bowl. The motor didn't balk at kneading a big batch of bread dough—but if ever on

the verge of overload will automatically shut off for protection. Also new, you can now adjust the attachments so they better reach the bottom of the bowl.

But be aware:

The stainless-steel bowl's construction felt slightly flimsy compared to older KitchenAid models. The touted "ten-speed" machine really consists of just six speeds: an initial stir and five even-numbered speeds (2, 4, 6, 8, and 10). Though sturdy, if bread dough is kneaded at anything higher than speed 2, the mixer is prone to creeping along the countertop.



Best buy



Hamilton Beach Eclectrics

Average price: \$169.99
Capacity: 4½ quarts
Comes with a flat beater, dough hook, and whisk

What we love: This mixer is perfect for the ardent home baker who is looking for a good deal. It offers solid overall performance and sturdy all-metal construction. It mixes efficiently, evenly, and thoroughly and offers a good range of speeds, including an agreeable slow start. It steadily developed an even foam when whipping cream and egg whites, unlike many other mixers in its price range, which left a pool of unmixed liquid hiding underneath.

But be aware: This mixer isn't suited to kneading large quantities of bread dough (although it's fine for the average loaf recipe that consists of no more than 4 cups flour). Depending on the task, the bowl size can feel a little cramped. The attachments could stand to reach slightly closer to the bowl's bottom, and they're not adjustable. As with the other recommended mixers, the speeds are even digits only, so the touted "twelve" speeds really represent just six.



Industrial strength



Viking Professional Stand Mixer

Average price: \$400
Capacity: 5 quarts (also available in 7 quarts)
Comes with a flat beater, dough hook, and whisk

What we love: The performance of this mixer mirrors its industrial looks—think powerful. It's hefty, too; it didn't budge when kneading bread dough, even at high speeds. The speed control mechanism is a large dial—clever and easy to operate—and it starts smoothly with a slow "stir" speed. The flat beater's curved shape (it looks warped) made it effortless to scrape clean with a spatula, and, like the KitchenAid, the beater nicely reached the bowl's sides, which

minimized the need for frequent scraping. If necessary, the beater and other attachments can be adjusted to better reach the bottom of the bowl. The tilt mechanism for the head lift is designed so it can't come crashing down, and it can lock into place. Rear-mounted wheels facilitate moving the mixer on the counter.

But be aware: This is an expensive mixer whose general performance is on par with the less costly KitchenAid. Its "twelve" speeds really only amount to eight (a stir plus seven higher speeds). It's cumbersomely large (for dimensions, see the sidebar at right), so it's a countertop space hog.

Be sure the mixer fits your kitchen

As we lined up the mixers for testing on our test kitchen countertops, we found that some models collided with the overhead cabinets when we tried to lift or tilt back the mixers' heads (even when the mixers were pulled to the front edge of the countertop). Word of advice: If you plan to use your stand mixer on a countertop with cabinets set above, measure first. **Be sure the space between the counter and the cabinet is greater than the mixer's maximum height (with the head tilted up). Here are the maximum dimensions for our top mixers.**

MIXER DIMENSIONS depth x height in inches

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| KitchenAid | 13 x 16½ |
| Hamilton Beach | 13½ x 19 |
| Viking | 16 x 19 |
| DeLonghi | 14 x 19½ |
| Sunbeam | 13½ x 16½ |

(Equipment continues on p. 38)



Solid performer



DeLonghi Die-Cast Aluminum Stand Mixer

Average price: \$299
Capacity: 5 quarts (also available in 7 quarts)
Comes with a flat beater, dough hook, and whisk

What we love: This mixer is strikingly similar in design to the Viking; even the beaters are shaped alike. We love the speed dial on this mixer, as it lets you gradually increase the power like an accelerator between the six marked speeds plus a slow start and a "max" speed. The attachments can be adjusted, if necessary, to better reach the bottom of the bowl. Even if the head isn't locked into place when lifted, a spring-loaded hinge prevents it from crash-

ing down. An overload protector stops the mixer before it overheats. We appreciate the double handles on the bowl (like a stock-pot's) and the brushed aluminum exterior (it hides fingerprints).

But be aware: This isn't quite as heavy-duty (or as heavy) as the Viking. While it kneaded a big batch of bread dough, the housing got quite hot (though the overload protection didn't kick in), and on higher speeds, the mixer began to shake. When the head is lifted, a gap opens in the body that could prove a bear to clean. The nonstick coating on the attachments didn't make them any easier to clean.

WORTH NOTING:

Sunbeam Heritage Series Mixmaster

Average price: \$189.99
Capacity: 4 $\frac{2}{3}$ quarts
Comes with a pair of beaters, dough hooks, and wire whisks, as well as a 2.2-quart mini mixing bowl

This nostalgic all-metal mixer isn't as powerful as our top three mixers, but its persistence as well as its proficiency at light mixing tasks, such as batters and cookie doughs, earned it an honorable mention. This mixer is appropriate for someone who would like the perk of hands-free mixing but doesn't want or need a beefy machine. It's not strong enough for stiff doughs, such as yeast bread, and the mixing bowl has flaws: it lacks a handle, its flat bottom requires frequent scraping, and it can be jittery at high speeds. But we loved the mini bowl for whipping just one or two egg whites or a small volume of heavy cream.



THE ALSO-RANS

Here's a list of the other stand mixers we tested, along with brief notes on their shortcomings.

Bosch
Compact MUM 4405
\$125; 4 quarts
Attachments caught on the bowl when tilting the mixer head up; poor paddle design didn't reach ingredients at the bowl's bottom.

Electrolux
Assistant DLX2000
\$499; 8 quarts
Unintuitive and difficult to use; too many parts; more machine than the average home baker would ever need.

Farberware
model #FSM126E
\$149.99; 4 quarts
Flimsy plastic construction; couldn't mix cookie dough, just flung ingredients to sides of bowl.

Jenn-Air Attrezzi
model #JSM900
\$349; 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ quarts
Generally good performance except with bread; top-heavy, so mixer was unstable when head was tilted back; glass bowl impractical for mixing purposes, especially at \$50 for a replacement.

KitchenAid Artisan
\$249.99; 5 quarts
This tilting head model is good overall but for \$50 more we much prefer the Professional version (see p. 36), which features a wider bowl design and, according to the manufacturer, is 45% more powerful.

Maryellen Driscoll is Fine Cooking's editor at large. Abigail Johnson Dodge, a Fine Cooking contributing editor and author of The Weekend Baker, consulted on testing. ♦

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Easy Lemon-Berry Dessert Topping



1/2 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon Curd
1/2 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Black Raspberry Preserves
1 8-oz. pkg. Cream Cheese, softened
Optional: Berries, fresh or frozen

Puree all ingredients together. Refrigerate for 1 hr. Makes about 2 cups. **SERVING IDEAS:** Serve over your favorite angel food, pound or cheese cake. Use filling in chocolate or pastry cups. Try creating your own dessert masterpiece...pour sauce into a squeeze bottle and swirl onto dessert plate and over your dessert for an elegant, picture-perfect treat!



Strawberry Lemon Frost Shakes



1 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Pacific Mountain[®] Strawberry Preserves
3/4 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon Curd
1 c. Plain Yogurt
1/2 c. Apple Juice
4 Ice Cubes
Optional: Strawberries, fresh or frozen
Combine all ingredients in a blender container and process until frothy. Divide into two stemmed glasses and garnish with strawberries. Makes 2 servings.

Try substituting your favorite Dickinson's[®] flavor!



Citrus Chicken with Raspberry Sauce



Marinade:
1 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon or Lime Curd
8 oz. Plain Yogurt
3 Tbsp. Cilantro, chopped
1 sm. Jalapeno Pepper, seeded & chopped
1 tsp. Salt
6 Chicken Breast Halves, skinless, boneless

In a medium bowl combine Curd, yogurt, cilantro, jalapeno and salt; blend well. Marinate chicken for 4 hrs. or overnight. Discard marinade. Grill chicken until it is no longer pink. Stir together Preserves and lime juice and drizzle over chicken. Serve immediately. Makes 6 servings.

Sauce:
1 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Cascade Mountain[™] Red Raspberry Preserves
2 Tbsp. Lime Juice



Raspberry Lemon Trifle



1 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Cascade Mountain[™] Red Raspberry Preserves
1 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon Curd
1 lg. box Instant Vanilla Pudding Mix
1 c. Milk

Tear cake into small pieces, set aside. Mix pudding & milk, then fold in Curd; set aside. Put a layer of cake pieces (about 1/3) on the bottom of a trifle dish or deep glass dish. Stir Preserves with a spoon to soften, then spoon 1/3 on top of the 1st cake layer, then top with 1/3 of the Curd mixture & 1/3 whipped topping. Repeat layering until all of the cake is used up. Refrigerate for 2 hrs. Garnish with optional raspberries. Makes 10-12 servings.

1 10"-rd. Angel Food Cake
1 8-oz. container Whipped Topping
Optional: Raspberries, fresh or frozen



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WINNING TIP

Cutting even cake layers

My six-layer banana nut cake may never taste quite as good as my grandmother's version, but my layers always look great, thanks to the foolproof cutting technique she taught me. Just take a long piece of thread and wrap it around the circumference of the cake, crossing the two ends and tightening until you see a slight impression in the "waist" of the cake. At this point, adjust the thread if it's not level, and then keep tugging the thread until it slices through the cake. I've found that this cutting method works for all types of layer cakes, not just banana.

—Sonia Gibbs, Clemmons,
North Carolina

A prize for the best tip

Attention clever cooks: We want your best tips—we'll pay for the ones we publish—and we'll give a prize to the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fc@taunton.com.

The prize for this issue's winner: Nordicware bundt pan, Kaiser La Forme springform loaf pan, and Magic Line square and rectangular cake pans; value, \$105.



Leftover cookies today; crumb crusts tomorrow

I put leftover undecorated molasses, chocolate, and sugar cookies in the food processor to make cookie crumbs. I store the crumbs in the freezer and use them instead of graham-cracker crumbs when I make desserts with crumb crusts.

—Adele Deeter,
West Chester, Ohio

Create work space

I create extra "counter" space in my galley kitchen by putting a sturdy baking sheet on top of an opened kitchen drawer.

—Linda Bell,
Warwick, New York

Dry tart pans in the oven

I find it impossible to thoroughly towel-dry fluted tart pans. As a consequence, my pans, which are tinned, have a few rust spots. To prevent further damage, I now place the pans in a warm oven after washing them. The heat remaining in the oven after I'm done baking is sufficient to thoroughly dry the pans.

—Jennifer Lumley,
Airmont, Virginia



Make a bouquet of measuring spoons

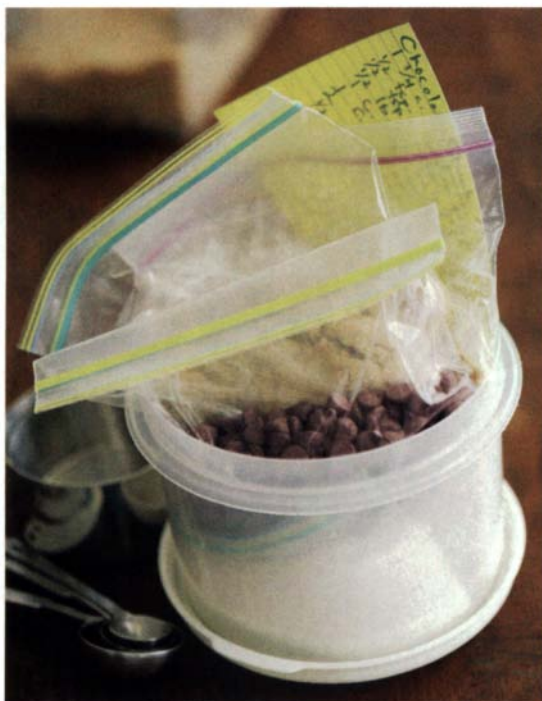
Tired of fumbling with measuring spoons? Here's a simple solution: Buy a few sets, remove the spoons from those pesky rings, and store them in a colorful mug on your kitchen counter. The spoons are much more accessible this way.

—Kerry Sherck,
Bridgeport, Connecticut

Measure now, bake later

To get a head start on my holiday baking marathon, I measure out ingredients for my recipes a few weeks in advance. For every recipe on my baking list, I put the measured dry ingredients (flour, leaven, salt, etc.) into a plastic bag, the measured sugar into a second bag, and mix-ins like chocolate chips and nuts into a third bag. I store all three bags—along with the recipe—in a plastic container, and I repeat this process for every recipe I plan to bake.

—Helene L. Stone,
Highland Park, Illinois



Goop-free faucet handles

Before I start any baking project, I wrap small sandwich baggies around the handles of my kitchen faucet. This way, when I turn on the faucet to wash sticky batter or dough off my hands, I don't get goop all over the faucet handles.

—Anna Victoria Reich,
Albuquerque, New Mexico



Find spices at a glance

If you keep your spice jars in a kitchen drawer below eye level, it's a good idea to write the spices' names on the bottles' lids. That way, you can find what you need without lifting each item out of the drawer to read its label.

—Linda Jawitz,
New York, New York



Keeping track of cookbook recipes

I love buying cookbooks, but it's hard to keep track of which recipes I've made and which ones I'd like to try. Now, when I bring home a new cookbook, I browse through and place a sticky note at the top of every page with a recipe I want to try. Once I make the recipe, I move the sticky to the side of the page, jotting any comments about the recipe on the note.

—Maureen Fox Lucas,
La Cañada, California

great ways to use parchment

A little parchment gives bar cookies a lift

Extracting the first bar cookie from the pan can be difficult, but it doesn't have to be. I line the bottom and sides of one corner of the pan with parchment—allowing some of the paper to extend beyond the rim. Then I pour in the batter, bake and slice the bars as usual, and tug on the paper to lift the corner bar cleanly from the pan. Once that bar is removed, it's a cinch to get other bars out with a small spatula.

—Sunday Williams,
Olympia, Washington

Roll out delicate dough on parchment

When I make sugar cookies from fragile or sticky dough, I roll out the dough on a sheet of parchment, and I leave it on the parchment while I cut shapes into the dough with a cookie cutter. Instead of transferring the cookies to a baking sheet with a spatula (which usually distorts the shapes), I cut the paper around each cookie, and lift the paper and cookie to the baking sheet.

—Veronique Vitt,
Town & Country, Missouri

Moist, Tender Snack Cakes

BY NICOLE REES

A bowl and a whisk are all you need



One-bowl cocoa cake. You can sift the dry ingredients right into the bowl with the creamed butter, sugar, and eggs.

In addition to all the scheduled festivities, the holiday season always delivers delightful surprises: a last-minute invitation to a neighbor's open house, an unexpected visit from an old friend, a rare evening when everyone happens to be home in time for dinner. For times like these, I go back to my roots as a baker and pull out my favorite snack cake recipes. Their flavors are perennial favorites: cocoa, vanilla, spice, and banana. And they're so simple that you don't even have to plug in the mixer. All you need is a bowl and a whisk.

These humble, comforting cakes—just one delicious layer—are terrific plain, but they can be dressed up, too, with a dusting of confectioners' sugar if you want to take them to a party or give them away. Best of all, they're so easy, you don't need to wait for a special occasion to make them.

Baking, unplugged. So, why a bowl and a whisk rather than a wooden spoon or an electric mixer? Every cook has a favorite kitchen gadget or tool. For me, it's a worn, rather flimsy whisk that I bought at a discount store. It's the perfect mixing tool for these cakes: The thin tines blend very soft butter (see the photo on p. 46), sugar, and eggs with great ease and efficiency. And when it's time to mix in the dry ingredients, the flour disappears quickly so there's little danger of overmixing the batter and toughening the cake.

Cakes for every occasion. I love the versatility of these cakes. The streusel-topped sweet potato spice cake is a satisfying afternoon treat, but I also love it with my morning coffee. The same is true for the cranberry upside-down cake, which started out in my house as a casual dessert, but now appears at brunch and at teatime as well. The coffee-cocoa snack cake's dark crumb is very elegant, but it's so rich and moist that even the most sophisticated adults ask for a tall glass of cold milk. You can enhance the cake's kid-appeal by cutting a stencil out of parchment and dusting on confectioners' sugar. And if you want to dress it up even more, a simple frosting of thick ganache or whipped cream is all it takes.



Coffee-Cocoa Snack Cake

Yields one 9-inch-square cake; serves sixteen.

The coffee in this recipe intensifies the chocolate flavor of this super-moist cake. I suggest you use a freshly ground, medium-bodied variety, such as Colombian.

5 ounces (10 tablespoons) very soft unsalted butter; more for the pan
1⅔ cups granulated sugar
2 large eggs, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon table salt
7¼ ounces (1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for the pan
2½ ounces (½ cup plus ⅓ cup) unsweetened natural cocoa powder (not Dutch-processed)
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon baking powder
1½ cups good-quality brewed coffee, cooled to warm

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Generously butter a 9-inch-square baking pan. Line the bottom of the pan with a square of parchment, butter the parchment, and then flour the bottom and sides of the pan. Tap out any excess flour.

If mixing by hand, put the softened butter and sugar in a medium bowl. Using a wooden spoon, cream them until smooth, about 1 minute. Switch to a whisk and blend in the eggs one at a time. Stir for another 30 seconds, until the batter is smooth and the sugar begins to dissolve. (If using a stand mixer, put the butter and sugar in the bowl and, using the paddle attachment, cream until smooth, about 1 minute. Blend in the eggs one at a time, mixing just until incorporated, about 20 seconds. Then switch to a whisk and blend in the rest of the ingredients by hand.) Mix in the vanilla and salt. Sift the flour, cocoa, baking soda, and baking powder directly onto the batter. Pour in the coffee. Gently whisk the ingredients until the mixture is smooth and mostly free of lumps.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan, spreading it evenly with a rubber spatula. Bake until a skewer inserted in the center comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it, 40 to 43 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool for 20 minutes. Carefully run a knife around the edges of the pan, invert the cake onto the rack, and remove the pan. Invert again onto another rack and let cool right side up until just warm. Serve immediately or wrap in plastic and store at room temperature for up to five days.

Brown-Butter Banana Cake with Chocolate Chips

Yields 1 bundt cake; serves twelve.

½ pound (1 cup) unsalted butter; more for the pan
1⅓ cups granulated sugar
3 large eggs
1 cup finely mashed ripe bananas (2 medium bananas)
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon table salt
7½ ounces (1⅔ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for the pan
1¼ teaspoons baking soda
¾ cup mini semisweet chocolate chips

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour a 10-cup decorative tube or bundt pan. Tap out any excess flour.

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium-low heat. Once the butter is melted, cook it slowly, letting it bubble, until it smells nutty or like butterscotch and turns a deep golden hue, 5 to 10 minutes. If the butter splatters, reduce the heat to low. Remove the pan from the heat and pour the browned butter through a fine sieve into a medium bowl and discard the bits in the sieve. Let the butter cool until it's very warm rather than boiling hot, 5 to 10 minutes.

Using a whisk, stir the sugar and eggs into the butter. (Since the butter is quite warm, you can use cold eggs for this.) Whisk until the mixture is smooth (the sugar may still be somewhat grainy), 30 to 60 seconds. Whisk in the mashed bananas, vanilla, and salt. Sift the flour and baking soda directly onto the batter. Pour the chocolate chips over the flour. Using a rubber spatula, stir just until the batter is uniformly combined. Don't overmix.

Spoon the batter into the prepared pan, spreading it evenly with the rubber spatula. Bake until a skewer inserted in the center comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it, 42 to 45 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool for 15 minutes. Invert the cake onto the rack and remove the pan. Let cool until just warm and then serve immediately or wrap well in plastic and store at room temperature for up to five days.



Shortcuts for bakers

Over the years, I've formed a few habits in the kitchen to speed up baking preparations.

EGGS AT ROOM TEMPERATURE.

No one has time to wait for ingredients to come to room temperature. I soak cold eggs in warm water to speed them along.

SOFTENED BUTTER. I often soften butter by placing it on the range while the oven heats up. The microwave is great for softening butter, too, and also for bringing milk to room temperature and melting chocolate, as long as you keep a close watch to prevent overheating. Instead of using extra butter for greasing the pans, I use what's left in the wrapper or a bit of whatever fat I'm using in the recipe.

SIFTING FLOUR. When it comes to sifting, I use a strainer held right over the bowl. And, if cocoa powder isn't involved (its lumps are small and stubborn) and I've measured my flour carefully on a scale, I sometimes don't sift at all—instead, I just whisk the flour, salt, and leavens in a bowl until fluffy and well combined.

Sweet Potato Spice Cake with Fresh Ginger & Pecan Streusel Topping

Yields one 9-inch square cake; serves sixteen.

This cake is incredibly moist, thanks to the sweet potato, and the fresh ginger adds a vibrancy that other spice cakes can only dream of. One piece is never enough.

FOR THE PECAN STREUSEL TOPPING:

3 ounces ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup very firmly packed light brown sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped toasted pecans
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon table salt
2 ounces ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) unsalted butter, melted

FOR THE CAKE:

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup vegetable oil; more for the pan
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups very firmly packed light brown sugar
3 large eggs, at room temperature
1 cup baked, mashed sweet potato, at room temperature or slightly warmer (from about one 15-ounce sweet potato)
1 tablespoon molasses
1 tablespoon finely grated fresh ginger
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon table salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom
 $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg or $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 $7\frac{1}{2}$ ounces ($1\frac{2}{3}$ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour; more for the pan
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons baking soda

Make the pecan streusel topping: In a small bowl, stir the flour, brown sugar, pecans, and salt. Drizzle the melted butter over the dry ingredients and stir until well combined. The streusel should feel clumpy, not sandy, when gently squeezed between your fingertips. If the streusel seems dry, add more melted butter.

Make the cake: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly oil and flour a 9-inch-square baking pan; tap out excess flour.

In a medium bowl, combine the oil, brown sugar, and eggs and, using a whisk, stir until the mixture is smooth and the sugar begins to dissolve, 30 to 60 seconds. If the sugar forms lumps, break them up with your fingers; a few tiny lumps are fine. Whisk in the sweet potato, molasses, grated ginger, salt, cinnamon, cardamom, and nutmeg. Sift

the flour and baking soda directly onto the batter. Using a whisk or rubber spatula, combine the ingredients until well blended and almost smooth.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan, spreading it evenly with the spatula. Sprinkle the streusel evenly over the batter, creating small clumps as you go by squeezing the streusel between your fingers. Bake until a skewer inserted in the center comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it, about 45 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool for 15 minutes. Run a knife around the edge of the pan. Let cool until just warm and then cut into squares and serve from the pan, or wrap well in plastic. Store at room temperature for up to a week.



Baking a sweet potato

Baking and mashing a sweet potato is easy. Heat the oven to 450°F. Prick the skin of the sweet potato several times with a fork, set the potato directly on the oven rack, and bake until very tender, about 1 hour. (If you're in a hurry, prick a large sweet potato with a fork, set on a paper towel, and microwave on high until tender, about 5 minutes.) When the potato is cool enough to handle, peel off the skin and smash the flesh in a bowl with a masher, or whisk until smooth.



Cranberry Upside-Down Cake

Yields one 9-inch round cake; serves twelve.

½ pound (1 cup) very soft unsalted butter; more for the pan
1 cup very firmly packed light brown sugar
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 cups cranberries, fresh or frozen (thawed, rinsed, and dried), at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
2 large eggs, at room temperature
⅔ cup sour cream, at room temperature
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
½ teaspoon table salt
7 ounces (1¾ cups) cake flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon baking soda

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly butter the bottom and sides of a 9-inch round cake pan with sides at least 2½ inches high. (A springform pan will work; just be sure to set it on a foil-lined baking sheet to catch any leaks.)

Put 4 tablespoons of the butter in the buttered pan. Put the pan in the oven until the butter melts, about 5 minutes. Remove the pan from the oven and stir in the brown sugar and cinnamon until well combined. Spread the brown sugar mixture evenly over the bottom of the pan and spread the cranberries evenly over the sugar.

Put the remaining 12 tablespoons butter in a medium bowl. Using a wooden spoon, cream the butter with the granulated sugar and egg yolk until blended, about 20 seconds. Switch to a whisk and stir in the eggs one at a time. Whisk until the batter is smooth and the sugar begins to dissolve, about 30 seconds. Whisk in the sour cream, vanilla, and salt. Sift the cake flour, baking powder, and baking soda directly onto the batter. Using the whisk, combine the ingredients until the mixture is smooth and free of lumps.

Spread the batter evenly over the cranberry mixture in the cake pan. Bake until the center of the cake springs back when gently touched and a skewer inserted in the center comes out with only moist crumbs clinging to it, 50 to 65 minutes. Set the pan on a rack to cool for 5 to 10 minutes (the cranberry syrup in the bottom of the pan will be too thick if you wait longer). Run a knife between the cake and sides of the pan. Invert the cake onto a serving plate and remove the pan. Let cool for at least 15 minutes more before serving. This cake is best served warm and fresh.



Very soft butter

The recipes for the cranberry upside-down cake at right and the coffee-cocoa snack cake on p. 43 call for very soft butter, which makes it easy to whisk the batters entirely by hand. Before you make these recipes, give the butter plenty of time to warm

up. You can tell your butter is soft enough if it squishes when poked very lightly with a finger.

Baker and cookbook author Nicole Rees works as a food technologist in Portland, Oregon. ♦

Caramel Popcorn

Buttery, crunchy, and
perfect for giving

BY KAREN DeMASCO



As the pastry chef at Craft restaurant in Manhattan, I'm not only surrounded by sweets all day, it's also my job to taste them—all of them. It can be a bit much, so I usually just take little tastes. There is one thing, however, that I have a hard time staying away from: caramel popcorn. I find its salty sweetness addictive, even after making and tasting it hundreds of times.

And I'm not the only one who feels this way. We send out

Equipment:

- ❖ Two heatproof rubber spatulas
- ❖ Large metal bowl, at least twice the volume of the popped popcorn
- ❖ Measuring cups and spoons
- ❖ 8-quart (or larger) stockpot with a tight-fitting lid
- ❖ 4-quart saucepan
- ❖ Wooden spoon
- ❖ Metal whisk
- ❖ Pastry brush
- ❖ Two rimmed baking sheets, lined with nonstick silicone mats, parchment, or aluminum foil

Watch us making caramel popcorn from start to finish at www.finecooking.com

a small dish of caramel popcorn as part of our petit four plate, and it really strikes a chord with guests—in fact, they often ask for more. And I'm certain the same thing will happen when you share this with your friends and family. Caramel popcorn makes a great gift, too. But be forewarned, this stuff is so irresistible you might want to make two batches: one to munch on, one to wrap up.

For perfect popcorn, use a flat-based pot and hot oil

This might sound odd, but making popcorn on the stove is one of the first things new pastry cooks at Craft must learn. And believe me, it has been a challenge for many of them. Unlike me, they grew up thinking you pop popcorn by putting a bag in the microwave. Without guidance, their results on the stove would be charred popcorn from letting the pot get too hot, or tough popcorn from starting with a pan that's too cold.

It's important to use a flat-based pot that evenly distributes heat and to get the oil so hot that the popcorn pops quickly. I put the oil in the pot and set it on the stove over high heat. Then I go measure out the popcorn. When I get back to the stove, the oil is almost hot enough. To test the oil's temperature, I put one kernel into the pot and cover it. When it pops, you're ready to pop your corn. If your oil smokes, it's too hot. Pull the pot off for a minute and then put it back on the

heat and add your kernels. Once you've added the kernels, shake the pot back and forth while cooking to keep the kernels and the popped corn from burning.

Making caramel is easier than you think

Making caramel is nothing to be afraid of: All it really requires is close attention. Caramel is only difficult to deal with when it burns or boils over, and if you're watching it, neither should happen. But if it does burn, don't pour the smoking mess into the sink or run cold water into the pot. Instead, set the pot in the sink and drizzle hot water into the pot while you stand back. Then, put the pot with the water back on the stove over low heat to make a thin syrup, which you can later pour down the drain.

Some caramels are cooked to an amber or dark golden color, which takes the sugar much closer to the point where it burns. The caramel for this recipe is rather light, so take it off of the heat as soon as there's a hint of golden color.

The other potentially scary part comes next: When you add the baking soda and the caramel bubbles up. Don't be alarmed; as long as you've used a deep pot, you'll have plenty of room for the caramel to rise. If you're still worried, move the pot near or into the sink when you add the baking soda. This way, if the caramel does bubble over, the mess will be minimal.

Make the caramel and add the baking soda



Brush the sides of the pan clean with a wet pastry brush after you stir the water, sugar, salt, and butter.



Watch the boiling syrup, but don't stir or swirl it. Once the syrup turns a golden caramel color, take it off the heat.



Whisk in the baking soda. The caramel will bubble vigorously and quickly rise up in the pan.

Caramel Popcorn

Yields about 4 quarts.

At Craft, I like to send out a small bowl of caramel popcorn as a parting gift to guests. I prefer yellow popcorn; it seems to yield the biggest popped kernels.

Nonstick cooking spray or vegetable oil
3 tablespoons vegetable oil, such as peanut or canola
½ cup popcorn kernels, preferably yellow kernels
1½ teaspoons baking soda
3 cups granulated sugar
1½ tablespoons kosher salt
1½ ounces (3 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter, cut into small pieces

Pop the popcorn: Spray two large heatproof rubber spatulas and a very large metal bowl (at least twice the volume of the popped popcorn) with nonstick cooking spray, or lightly wipe with vegetable oil. Heat the oil in an 8-quart or larger heavy-based stockpot over high heat. After a minute, put a popcorn kernel in the pot and cover. When the kernel pops, the oil is hot enough. Add the rest of the popcorn

kernels. Cover the pot and shake it back and forth over the heat to agitate the kernels. Keep moving the pot as the popcorn pops. Remove the pot from the heat when the popping slows almost to a stop (it's better to have a few unpopped kernels than burnt popcorn) and immediately pour the popped corn into the large metal bowl. Search through the popcorn, removing any unpopped kernels (which fall to the bottom of the bowl) or burnt pieces.

Make the caramel: Measure the baking soda into a small dish so it's ready to go. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment, foil, or nonstick silicone mats. In a 4-quart or larger saucepan, combine the sugar, salt, butter, and 1 cup water. Gently stir with a wooden or metal spoon just enough to immerse the sugar. Brush down the sides of the pot with water and a clean pastry brush. Cook the sugar mixture over high heat without stirring until it melts and bubbles and turns a very light golden caramel color on top; this will take 10 to 20 minutes,

depending on your stove. The caramel will be darker than it appears on the surface, so don't overcook. At this point, remove the pot from the heat.

Working quickly off the heat, thoroughly whisk the baking soda into the caramel. Do this in or near the sink in case it spills over. The baking soda aerates the caramel, which makes it easier to eat when it's cool, but causes it to bubble vigorously now, so be careful. Immediately pour the bubbling caramel over the popcorn in the bowl. Just use the caramel that pours out easily; don't scrape the sides of the pot (the sugar on the sides of the pot crystallizes easily and can cause the caramel to do the same).

Using the heatproof spatulas, toss the caramel with the popcorn. When the popcorn is thoroughly coated, pour it onto the lined baking sheets and use the spatulas to pat it into one flat layer. As soon as it's cool enough to touch, use your hands to break the layer into smaller clusters. Let them cool completely and then store in an airtight container for up to a week.



However you wrap it, caramel popcorn makes a great gift.

VARIATIONS:

Spicy: Stir ¾ teaspoon cayenne into the baking soda and add to the caramel as directed.

Nutty: Toss 2 cups lightly salted peanuts with the popcorn before pouring on the hot caramel.

Karen DeMasco runs the pastry departments at Craft, Craftbar, and 'wichcraft in New York City. She's working on her first dessert cookbook. ♦

Pour the caramel over the popcorn and toss



Pour the bubbling caramel onto the popcorn, taking care not to get any on yourself. Don't scrape out the pot.



Toss the popcorn and caramel as you would a salad, using two heatproof spatulas.



Pat the caramel popcorn into a single layer on lined baking sheets.

Stylish Tarts from a Quick Crust

Use cookie crumbs to make a short-cut crust, and then add a creamy filling for an impressive but easy dessert

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

I like to serve elegant desserts when I entertain, and a stylish tart is ideal for almost all occasions. But I'm especially busy during the holidays (or for that matter, any time of year), and I don't always have the time or patience to make a traditional sweet pastry dough. Luckily, I've found that using store-bought cookies, crushed into crumbs, makes a delicious, quick, and easy crust for tarts. My short-cut crust allows me to serve up a fancy dessert—and elicit “oohs” and “aahs” from my guests—without sacrificing excellent flavor or valuable time.

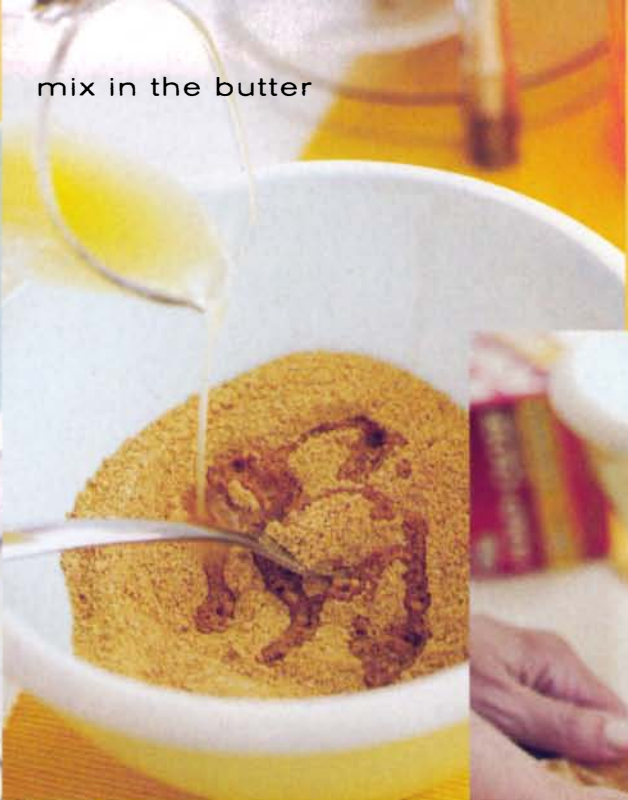
Crisp cookies make a crust with the best texture. With only three ingredients—cookie crumbs, a little sugar, and melted butter—this crust mixes up quickly and effortlessly. Any crisp cookie will work well, but avoid the sandwich or soft-and-chewy varieties, as they'll leave you with a soggy crust. I stick with choc-

olate wafers, vanilla cookies, and good old graham crackers, as these are cookies I usually have on hand.

A food processor pulverizes cookies quickly and easily. As far as I know, only graham crackers are sold already crushed into crumbs, but you can also make your own. A food processor makes easy work of chopping cookies into fine crumbs. If you don't have a food processor, just pop the cookies into a heavy-duty zip-top bag, press out the air, zip the bag closed, and gently pound on the cookies (a rolling pin or mallet works well) until you get fine, uniform crumbs.

Once you've made a crust, you can use it as a base for delicious tarts. I've included recipes for some of my favorite tart fillings: chocolate truffle with mascarpone topping, creamy orange ricotta, double-ginger pumpkin, and chocolate-glazed peanut butter. I've also suggested some filling-crust combinations, but the nice thing about these recipes is that you can mix and match to suit your own taste.





mix in the butter

MASTER RECIPE

Press-In Cookie Crusts

Yields one crust for one 9½-inch tart.


1 cup finely ground cookies
(ground in a food processor);
choose one from the
following: about 25 chocolate
wafers, 8 whole graham
crackers, or 35 vanilla wafers
(I like Nabisco Famous
Chocolate Wafers, Honey
Maid Graham's, and Nilla
Vanilla Wafers)

2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1½ ounces (3 tablespoons)
unsalted butter, melted

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Have ready an ungreased 9½-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom.


In a medium bowl, mix the cookie crumbs and sugar with a fork until well blended. Drizzle the melted butter over the crumbs and mix with the fork or your fingers until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Put the crumbs in the tart pan and use your hands to spread the crumbs so that they coat the bottom of the pan and start to climb the sides. Use your fingers to pinch and press some of the crumbs around the inside edge of the pan to cover the sides evenly and create a wall about a scant ¼ inch thick. Redistribute the remaining crumbs evenly over the bottom of the pan and press firmly to make a compact layer. (I like to use a metal measuring cup with straight sides and a flat base for this task.)

Bake the crust until it smells nutty and fragrant (crusts made with lighter-colored cookies will brown slightly), about 10 minutes. Set the baked crust on a rack and let cool. The crust can be made up to one day ahead and stored at room temperature, wrapped well in plastic.



press the crumbs
into the pan

TIP: If you don't have a food processor, put the cookies in a zip-top bag and crush them with a rolling pin.



bake and cool, then fill

TIP: Lay a piece of plastic wrap over the crumbs as you spread them so they won't stick to your hands.



try a ginger-pumpkin filling with a graham cracker crust

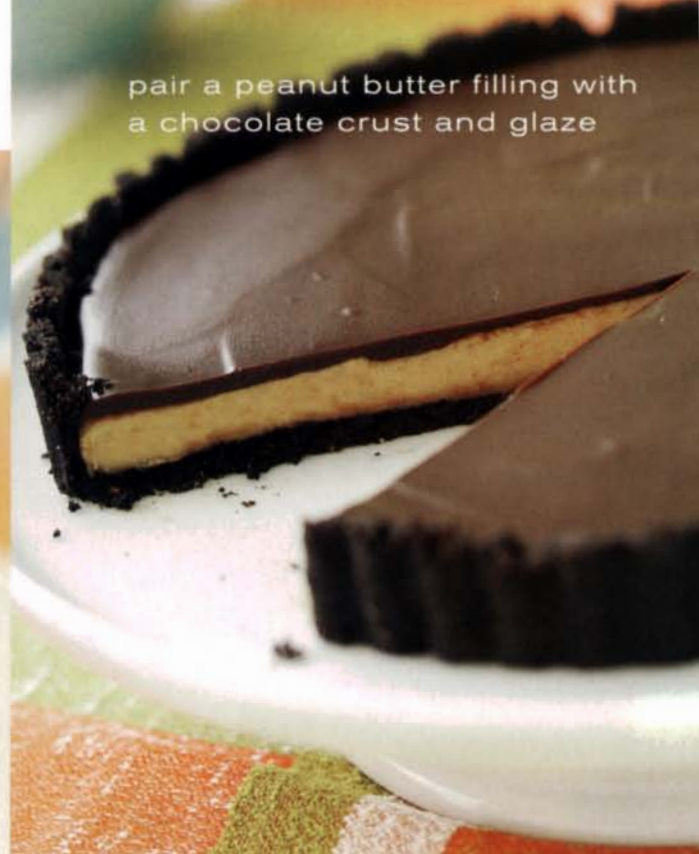
Double-Ginger Pumpkin Tart

Yields one 9½-inch tart; serves twelve.

6 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature
¾ cup very firmly packed light brown sugar
¾ cup solid-pack pumpkin purée (not seasoned pumpkin pie filling)
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 large egg yolk
1 large egg
¾ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 tablespoon finely chopped crystallized ginger (see p. 82 for sources); more for garnish
1 Press-In Cookie Crust (see the recipe on p. 51), baked and cooled (I like graham cracker or vanilla for this tart)
Whipped cream for garnish (optional)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. In a medium bowl, beat the cream cheese and brown sugar with a stand mixer or hand-held mixer on medium speed until smooth and lump-free, about 3 minutes. Add the pumpkin, cinnamon, ginger, and salt and continue beating until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the egg yolk, egg, and vanilla and beat until just incorporated. Sprinkle the chopped crystallized ginger over the batter and stir it in with a rubber spatula.

Use the spatula to scrape the filling into the crust and spread it evenly. Bake the tart until the filling just barely jiggles when the tart pan is nudged, 25 to 30 minutes. Transfer the tart to a rack and let cool completely. Refrigerate the tart in the pan until chilled and firm, about 3 hours. Garnish with whipped cream and crystallized ginger, if you like.



pair a peanut butter filling with a chocolate crust and glaze

Chocolate-Glazed Peanut Butter Tart

Yields one 9½-inch tart; serves twelve.

FOR THE FILLING AND CRUST:

1½ cups whole milk
¼ teaspoon table salt
3 large egg yolks
⅓ cup very firmly packed light brown sugar
4 teaspoons all-purpose flour
4½ ounces (½ cup) creamy peanut butter (preferably natural, made with only peanuts and salt)
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 Press-In Cookie Crust (see the recipe on p. 51), baked and cooled (I like chocolate or graham cracker for this tart)

FOR THE GLAZE:

3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
2 ounces (¼ cup) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
1 tablespoon light corn syrup

Make the filling: In a medium saucepan, bring the milk and salt to a simmer over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk the egg yolks, brown sugar, and flour until well blended. Slowly add the hot milk, whisking constantly. Pour the mixture back into the

Mix and match
fillings and cookie
crusts to make your
favorite combinations.

saucepan. Cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until it thickens and comes to a full boil, about 3 minutes. Continue to cook, whisking constantly, for 1 minute. Remove the pan from the heat and add the peanut butter and vanilla; whisk until well blended.

Pour the hot peanut butter mixture into the crust and spread evenly with a rubber or offset spatula. Gently press a piece of plastic wrap directly on the filling's surface to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate the tart until cold, about 2 hours, before proceeding with the recipe.

Make the glaze: Melt the chocolate in a small bowl in a microwave or in a double boiler over medium heat. (For information on how to melt chocolate, see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 70.) Add the butter and corn syrup and whisk until the butter is melted and the mixture is smooth, about 1 minute. Carefully remove the plastic wrap from the top of the chilled filling. Drizzle the glaze over the filling and spread it evenly to cover the tart completely. Refrigerate the tart in the pan until the glaze sets, about 30 minutes or up to 12 hours.

Creamy Orange Ricotta Tart

Yields one 9½-inch tart; serves twelve.

- 15-ounce container whole-milk ricotta (about 1½ cups)**
- 3 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature**
- ¾ cup granulated sugar**
- 2 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour**
- ¼ teaspoon table salt**
- 3 large egg yolks**
- 1 tablespoon finely grated orange zest**
- 1 tablespoon orange-flavored liqueur (such as Grand Marnier or Cointreau) or orange juice**
- 1 Press-In Cookie Crust (see the recipe on p. 51), baked and cooled (I like vanilla or chocolate for this tart)**
- Strips of orange zest or segments of blood orange, for garnish (optional)**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, combine the ricotta and cream cheese. Using an electric mixer, beat on medium speed until well blended and no lumps remain, about 3 minutes. Add the sugar, flour, and salt and continue beating until well blended, about 1 minute. Add the egg yolks, orange zest, and orange liqueur. Beat until just incorporated. Use a rubber spatula to scrape the filling into the crust and spread the filling evenly.

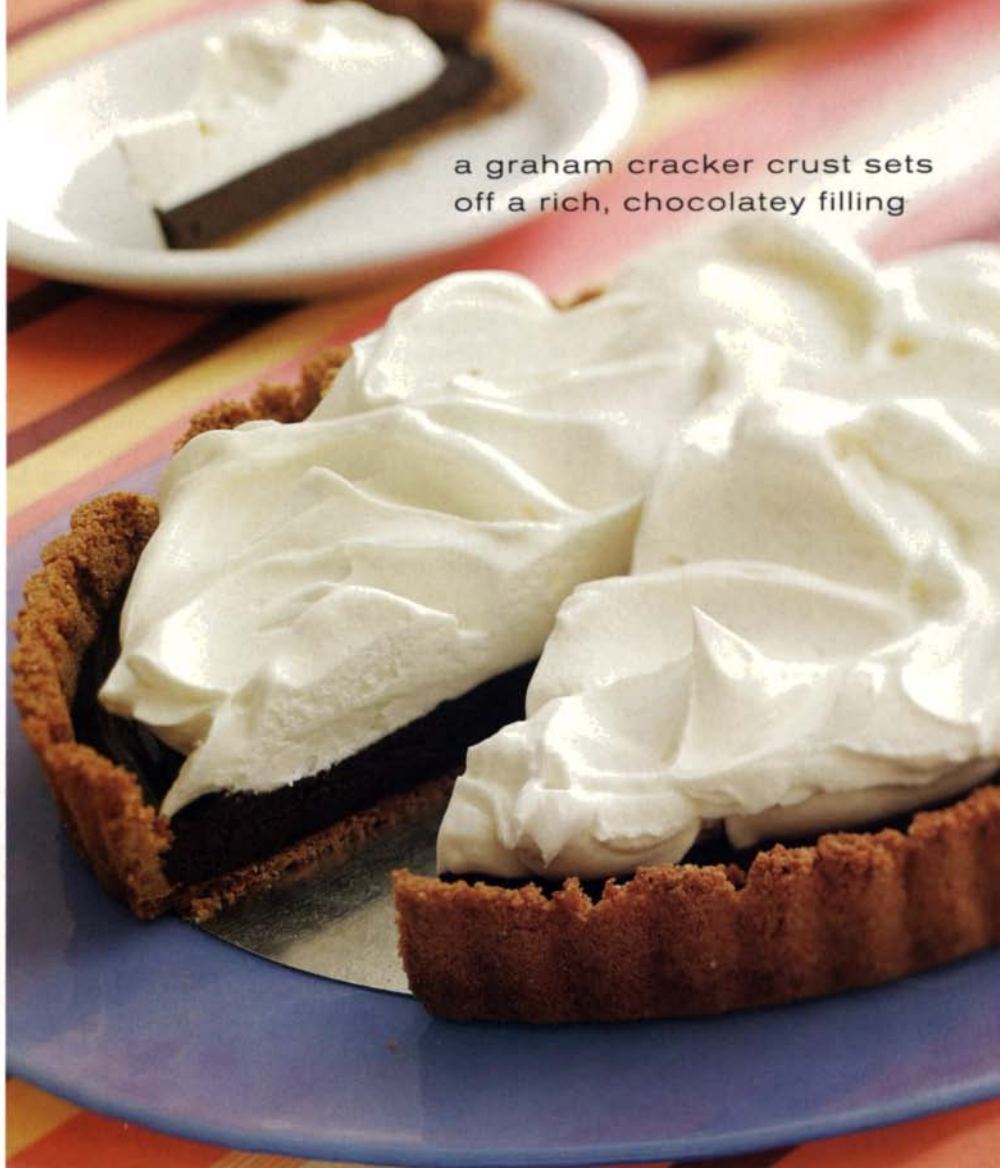
Bake the tart until the filling just barely jiggles when the pan is nudged, 30 to 35 minutes. Let cool completely on a rack. Refrigerate the tart in the pan until chilled and firm, 2 to 3 hours. Serve garnished with strips of orange zest or blood orange segments, if you like.



a vanilla crust makes a great match
for an orange ricotta filling



TIP: To remove a tart from the pan, set the pan on a wide can and let the outside ring fall away. If it's stubborn, grip the ring with your fingers to coax it off. Slide a long, thin metal spatula between the pan base and the crust and ease the tart onto a flat serving plate.



a graham cracker crust sets off a rich, chocolatey filling

Chocolate Truffle Tart with Whipped Vanilla Mascarpone Topping

Yields one 9½-inch tart; serves twelve to sixteen.

FOR THE FILLING:

- 12 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped**
- 1 cup whole milk**
- 2 ounces (¼ cup) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- ¼ teaspoon table salt**

- 1 Press-In Cookie Crust (see the recipe on p. 51), baked and cooled (I like graham cracker for this tart)**

FOR THE TOPPING:

- ½ pound mascarpone cheese, at room temperature**
- ¾ cup heavy cream**
- ¼ cup granulated sugar**
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract**

Make the filling: Melt together the chocolate, milk, and butter in a medium bowl in a microwave or in a double boiler over medium heat. (For information on how to melt chocolate, see *From Our Test Kitchen*, p. 70). Add the vanilla and salt. Whisk the mixture until well blended and smooth. Set aside, whisking occasionally, until room temperature and slightly thickened, about 1 hour. (For faster cooling, refrigerate the filling until thickened to a pudding consistency, about 30 minutes, whisking and scraping the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula every 5 minutes.)

With a rubber spatula, scrape the mixture into the crust and spread evenly, taking care not to disturb the edge of the crust. Let cool completely, cover, and refrigerate until the filling is set, about 4 hours and up to 8 hours before proceeding with the recipe.

Make the topping: In a medium bowl, combine the mascarpone, cream, sugar, and vanilla. Using an electric mixer, beat on low speed until almost smooth, 30 to 60 seconds. Increase the speed to medium high and beat until the mixture is thick and holds firm peaks, another 30 to 60 seconds. Don't overbeat.

With a rubber or metal spatula, spread the topping over the chocolate filling, leaving lots of swirls and peaks. Serve the tart right away or cover loosely and refrigerate, in the pan, for up to 4 hours.

Abigail Johnson Dodge, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, has written several cookbooks. Her latest book is The Weekend Baker. ♦



Slice & Bake Cookies at the Ready

BY CAROLE WALTER

With a stash of dough in the freezer, you can bake a batch of delicious holiday cookies at a moment's notice

*From the top:
Brown Sugar Spice
Cookies, Pinwheel
Cookies, Lemon-
Lime Butter Wafers,
Oatmeal-Cranberry
Cookies, Glazed
Maple-Pecan
Cookies.*

It's holiday time, you're in a hurry...and the cookie jar is empty. But wait! You've got a log of lemon-lime butter wafer dough in the refrigerator, already made. All you need to do is slice and bake. Slice-and-bake cookies—what I called icebox or refrigerator cookies growing up—are the quickest way to fill the jar and to make fabulous cookies for sharing with friends and family.

Slice-and-bake cookies are delicious, eye-catching, and versatile. The recipes produce large yields, making them a perfect choice for cookie exchanges and gift giving. And best of all, slice-and-bake cookies are nothing if not do-ahead and convenient. After the dough is mixed and shaped into logs, it may be either refrigerated or frozen. You can make your dough well before the holiday rush sets in. Then, when you're ready to bake, simply remove the logs from the freezer and set them in the refrigerator to thaw (for up to three days). Slice the dough into rounds, bake

them, and *voilà!*—you'll have batches of appealing, irresistible cookies. Just slice off as many cookies as you think you'll need; any dough you don't use can be refrozen.

These nifty cookies aren't difficult to make, but a few pointers will ensure that your cookies come out beautifully.

START WITH BUTTER THAT'S SOFTENED AT ROOM TEMPERATURE, BUT STILL FIRM. Starting with butter that's too soft will result in dough that's too soft, and thus trickier to shape into logs. If you're using a stand mixer, the butter should be soft enough that pressing with your fingertips will leave a slight impression. If you're using a hand-held mixer or mixing by hand, the butter should be just a little softer, so that pressing with your fingertips leaves a deep impression.

MIX JUST UNTIL THE INGREDIENTS ARE BLENDED. With these doughs, less mixing is definitely better than more, or you'll end up with cookies that are less than tender.

USE A FEW TRICKS AND TIPS FOR SHAPING THE DOUGH INTO PERFECT LOGS. The cookies will be delicious no matter how smoothly you shape them, but if you follow some pointers (see the sidebar at far right), your cookies will be a little easier to shape and a little more uniform when baked.

Lemon-Lime Butter Wafers

Yields about 8 dozen 2¼-inch cookies.

10 ounces (2¼ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
½ pound (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened
1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest (from about 1 large lemon)
1 tablespoon finely grated lime zest (from about 1 large lime)
1¼ cups granulated sugar
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Mix the dough: Sift the flour and salt into a medium bowl. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and both zests on medium low until well blended, about 2 minutes. Add 1 cup of the sugar in a steady stream and

mix for another 2 minutes until well blended. Blend in the lemon juice, lime juice, and vanilla. Reduce the speed to low and add the flour mixture in two additions, mixing just until blended.

Shape the dough: Have ready two 15-inch sheets of plastic wrap. Put the remaining ¼ cup sugar in a long, shallow pan (like a 7x11-inch Pyrex dish). Shape one half of the dough into a log about 10 inches long and roll gently in the sugar to thoroughly coat. Position the log on a sheet of plastic, centering it on the long edge closest to you. Roll tightly, twisting the ends of the plastic firmly to seal. With your hands on either end of the log, push it firmly toward the center to compact the dough. The finished log should be about 9 inches long and 1½ inches thick. Repeat with the remaining dough. Refrigerate

the logs until firm enough to slice, about 2½ hours, or freeze for up to three months.

Bake the cookies: Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment.

Working with one log at a time, use a sharp, thin-bladed knife to cut ⅛-inch thick rounds. Set the rounds 1 inch apart on the baking sheets and bake one sheet at a time until lightly browned around the edges, about 10 minutes, rotating the sheet as needed for even browning. Let cool on the pan for about 5 minutes before transferring the cookies to racks with a thin-bladed spatula. When cool, store layered between sheets of waxed paper in airtight containers for up to a week, or freeze for up to three months.

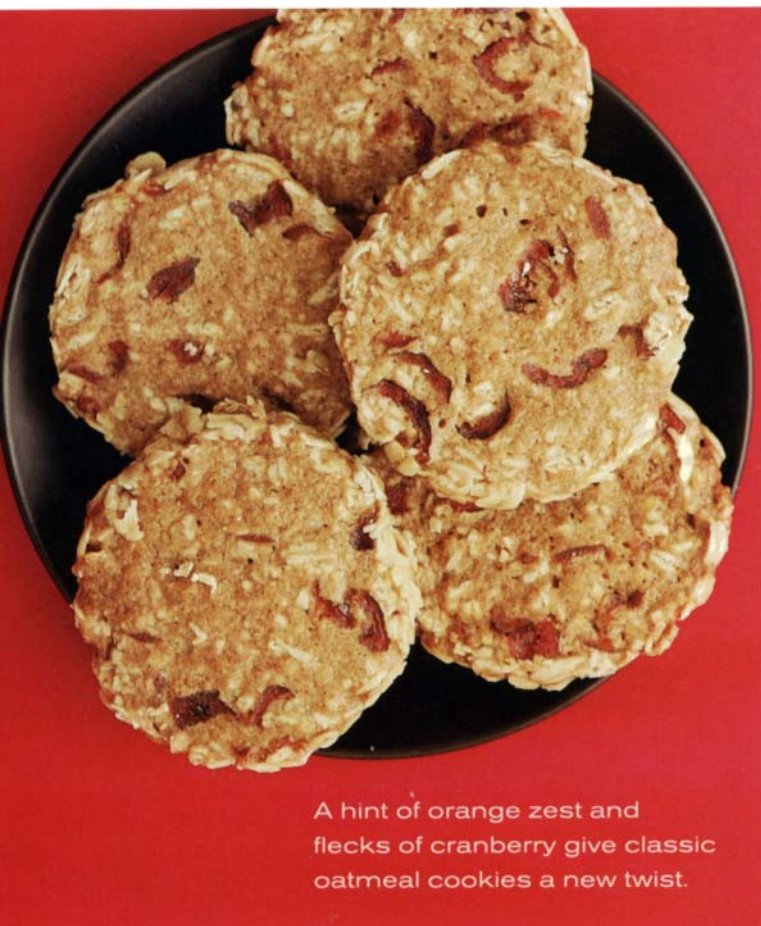
Q: How far ahead can I make the cookie dough? How should I store it?

A: Logs of slice-and-bake cookie dough can be stored in the refrigerator for up to three days. For longer storage, put the logs in a airtight, zip-top bags and freeze for up to three months. To thaw the logs, put them in the refrigerator overnight. Any unused dough may be frozen again.



Lemon-Lime Butter Wafers have a crisp, buttery texture and a refreshingly bright flavor.

Tricks and tips for shaping “logs” of dough



A hint of orange zest and flecks of cranberry give classic oatmeal cookies a new twist.

Oatmeal-Cranberry Cookies

Yields about 6 dozen 2 1/4-inch cookies.

1/3 cup orange juice
1/2 cup dried cranberries
1 3/4 cups old-fashioned oatmeal
5 3/4 ounces (1 1/4 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon table salt
6 ounces (3/4 cup) unsalted butter, slightly firm
1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
3/4 cup very firmly packed, very fresh dark brown sugar
1/4 cup granulated sugar
1 large egg
1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract

Mix the dough: In a small saucepan, heat the orange juice until very hot. Add the cranberries; let steep off the heat until softened, about 15 minutes. Drain the cranberries, pat dry on paper towels, and coarsely chop into 1/4-inch pieces.

Put the oatmeal in a food processor and pulse eight to ten times to just break up the

oatmeal. Remove 1/2 cup and transfer to a long shallow pan (like a 7x11-inch Pyrex dish). Add the flour, cinnamon, baking soda, and salt to the food processor and pulse with the remaining oatmeal eight to ten times just to blend the ingredients. Don't overprocess; the oatmeal should remain coarse.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and orange zest on medium low until well blended, about 2 minutes. Add both sugars and mix for another 2 minutes. Blend in the egg and vanilla, scraping the bowl as needed. Reduce the mixer speed to low. Add half of the dry ingredients, then the cranberries, and then the remaining dry ingredients. Mix just until combined.

Shape the dough: Have ready six 15-inch sheets of plastic wrap. Portion the dough into thirds. Drop spoonfuls of dough onto each sheet and use the plastic to roll and shape the dough into logs about 8 inches long. Refrigerate the dough to firm it slightly, about 30 minutes. When chilled, roll one log at a time in the reserved oatmeal. Reroll each log

Once your dough is mixed, make sure it's not too soft to shape. Stash it in the refrigerator for 20 to 30 minutes or until it's firm enough to handle. If it becomes too firm, just let it stand at room temperature until it's malleable.

When shaping dough into cylinders, sprinkling a thin dusting of flour (no more than a teaspoon) on the rolling surface can help make the logs easier to handle.

Moistening your hands ever so slightly can make shaping easier.

Put the cylinders of dough on plastic wrap at least 6 inches longer than the length of the log.

Take care not to roll the logs any longer than 10 inches; dough that you'll roll in nuts or other coatings will lengthen when coated, so start them off slightly shorter.

As you wrap the log in plastic, roll tightly and tug on the ends to tighten the plastic and to smooth any creases.

To secure the plastic, twist the ends well; then roll the dough back and forth to eliminate any air pockets.

To compact the log, push the ends of the cylinder firmly toward the center.

tightly in a clean sheet of plastic wrap, twisting the ends firmly to seal. With your hands at either end of the log, push firmly toward the center to compact the log so it measures about 7 inches long and 1 1/2 inches thick. Refrigerate the logs until firm enough to slice (they must be very well chilled), about 4 hours, or freeze for up to three months.

Bake the cookies: Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Working with one log at a time, use a tomato knife or other small serrated knife to slice the dough into 1/4-inch-thick rounds, using a gentle sawing motion. Set the rounds 1 inch apart on the prepared pans. Bake the cookies until set on top and lightly browned around the edges, about 15 minutes, rotating the pans as needed for even browning. Let cool on the sheets for about 5 minutes before transferring the cookies to racks. When cool, store between sheets of waxed paper in an airtight container for up to a week, or freeze for up to three months.

Brown Sugar Spice Cookies, edged with toasted walnuts, are perfect with a cup of mulled cider.



Brown Sugar Spice Cookies

Yields about 8 dozen 2-inch cookies.

11¼ ounces (2½ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¼ teaspoon ground allspice
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, softened
1½ cups very firmly packed, very fresh dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons molasses
1 large egg yolk
1 large egg
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
1 egg white
8 ounces (2 cups) coarsely chopped toasted walnuts

Mix the dough: Sift together the flour, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, salt, baking soda, allspice, and pepper. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment,

cream the butter on medium-low speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the brown sugar in three additions and then add the molasses; scrape the bowl as needed. Mix for another 2 minutes. Blend in the egg yolk, egg, and vanilla, scraping the bowl again. Reduce the speed to low and add the dry ingredients in three additions, mixing just until combined. Portion the dough into thirds, wrap each third in plastic, and refrigerate until slightly firm, about 30 minutes.

Shape the dough: Have ready three 15-inch sheets of plastic wrap. Whisk the egg white lightly with 1 teaspoon water. Put the chopped walnuts in a long, shallow pan (like a 7x11-inch Pyrex dish). Working with one piece of dough at a time on a lightly floured surface, roll into a log about 8 inches long. Set it on a sheet of waxed paper. Brush lightly all over with the egg white and then roll the log in the walnuts, pressing gently so the nuts adhere. The roll should lengthen to at least 9 inches. Position the log on a sheet of plastic wrap, centering it at the long edge closest to you.

Clever solutions for keeping your logs round

To keep your perfectly shaped round log from flattening out on the bottom while it chills, try these ideas:

Turn frequently. Put the logs on a level shelf or flat baking sheet in the refrigerator or freezer and turn each log every 15 minutes for the first hour. As the logs chill, the bottoms will flatten from the weight of the dough. To correct this, remold the logs by rolling them back and forth a few times on the countertop.

Use a cradle. If you happen to have a baguette pan, it makes a perfect cradle for chilling logs of dough. If you don't, save a few empty paper towel rolls, cut each in half lengthwise to make two cardboard troughs with rounded bottoms, and then place a log in each half for chilling. For both of these methods, after the logs have chilled for 15 to 20 minutes, turn them over once and chill until firm.

Roll tightly, twisting the ends firmly to seal. With your hands on either end of the log, push firmly toward the center to compact the dough. The finished log should measure about 9 inches long and 1¾ inches thick. Repeat with the remaining dough. Refrigerate until firm enough to slice, at least 2 hours, or freeze for up to three months.

Bake the cookies: Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Working with one log at a time, use a tomato knife or other small serrated knife to slice the dough into ¼-inch rounds, using a gentle sawing motion. Set the rounds 1 inch apart on the prepared pans and bake until the tops feel set and slightly firm, about 14 minutes, rotating the pans as needed. Let cool on the pans for 5 minutes. With a thin metal spatula, transfer the cookies to racks. When cool, store between sheets of waxed paper in a tightly covered container for up to a week, or freeze for up to three months.

Glazed Maple-Pecan Cookies

Yields about 6 dozen 2-inch cookies.

FOR THE DOUGH:

11 ¼ ounces (2½ cups)
unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
¾ cup granulated sugar
¼ cup very firmly packed,
very fresh dark brown sugar
1½ teaspoons maple flavoring
(available in supermarkets)
6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted
butter, slightly softened
1 large egg, at room temperature
¼ cup pure maple syrup
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
8 ounces (2 cups) toasted
pecans, coarsely chopped

FOR THE GLAZE:

¾ cup sifted confectioners'
sugar
¼ cup pure maple syrup, warmed
Hot water as needed for thinning

Mix the dough: Sift together the flour, salt, and baking soda. In a food processor, pulse the granulated and brown sugars to blend and then add the maple flavoring. Pulse five or six times and then process for 15 seconds. Scrape the bowl to be sure all of the flavoring has been incorporated.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter on medium-low speed until very smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the sugar mixture in three additions. Mix until lightened in color, about another 3 minutes. Add the egg and then the maple syrup and vanilla, mixing just until blended. Scrape the bowl as needed. Reduce the mixer speed to low. Mix in the dry ingredients in three additions, and then add the pecans and mix just until blended.

Shape the dough: Have ready three 15-inch sheets of plastic wrap. Portion the dough into

three equal pieces and roll each piece back and forth until it forms a log about 10 inches long. (You needn't flour the rolling surface.) Position each log on a sheet of plastic wrap, centering it at the edge closest to you. Roll tightly, twisting the ends firmly to seal. With your hands on either end, push the log firmly toward the center to compact the dough. The finished log should measure about 9 inches long and about 1½ inches thick. Refrigerate the logs until firm enough to slice, 2 to 3 hours, or freeze for up to three months.

Bake the cookies: Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Working with one log at a time, use a tomato knife or other small serrated knife to cut the dough into ¼-inch rounds using a gentle sawing motion. Set the rounds 1 inch apart on the prepared pans and bake until the cookies are lightly browned, about 18 minutes, rotating the pans as needed for even browning.

Meanwhile, make the glaze: Whisk the confectioners' sugar and maple syrup until smooth and pourable.

Remove the sheets from the oven and let rest on the baking sheets for 2 minutes. While the cookies are still hot, use a pastry brush to brush a thin layer of the glaze on top of each cookie. (If the glaze becomes too thick as it stands, thin it with a few drops of hot water.) Transfer the cookies to a rack; the glaze will become firm within minutes.

Store the cookies, layered between sheets of waxed paper, in an airtight container for up to a week, or freeze for up to three months.

Use a sharp knife and a ruler for even slices

To cut even slices of cookie dough, lay a ruler alongside the log of dough. Use your sharpest thin-bladed knife and a continuous slicing motion if the log is uncoated. If it's coated with nuts or other garnishes, use a small serrated knife and a gentle sawing motion for the cleanest cut.



Brush crunchy Maple-Pecan Cookies with a thin layer of glossy maple icing.

Layer chocolate and vanilla for a pretty pinwheel cookie

1 Portion each flavor of dough into three equal pieces. (For accuracy, use a scale.) Shape each piece into a 5x5-inch square on a piece of plastic wrap and wrap well. The chocolate will be thicker than the vanilla. Refrigerate the dough for 30 minutes. (If the dough becomes too hard, let it stand at room temperature for a few minutes before rolling).



2 While the dough is chilling, tear off twelve 12-inch squares of waxed paper. Roll each piece of dough into a 7x7-inch square between two sheets of the waxed paper. Without removing the waxed paper, layer the squares of dough on a baking sheet and refrigerate for 10 to 15 minutes. Have ready three 15-inch sheets of plastic wrap.



3 To shape the cookies, remove one square of the vanilla dough and one square of the chocolate dough from the refrigerator and peel off the top sheet of waxed paper from each. Invert the chocolate square over the vanilla square (or vanilla can go on top of chocolate; try some of each for variety), taking care to align the two layers as evenly as possible. Using your rolling pin, gently roll over the dough to seal the layers together. Peel off the top layer of waxed paper.

Pinwheel Cookies

Yields about 10 dozen 2-inch cookies.

13½ ounces (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda
10 ounces (1 ¼ cups) unsalted butter, slightly softened
1¼ cups granulated sugar
1 large egg
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
2 tablespoons boiling water
3 tablespoons unsweetened Dutch-processed cocoa powder
3 ounces bittersweet chocolate, melted and still warm (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 70, for how to melt chocolate)

Mix the dough: Sift together the flour, salt, and baking soda. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the butter on medium-low speed until smooth, about 2 minutes. Add the sugar in a steady stream and mix for another 2 minutes. Add the egg and vanilla and mix until well combined, scraping the bowl as needed. Reduce the speed to low and add the dry ingredients in two additions, mixing just until combined. Remove 2 cups less 2 tablespoons of the dough and set aside.

Dissolve the espresso powder in the boiling water and set aside briefly to cool. Then mix the espresso and cocoa powder into the remaining dough. Reduce the mixer speed to low, add the warm melted chocolate and mix just until thoroughly combined. To divide and shape the dough and roll it

into pinwheel logs, refer to the photos and captions above.

Bake the cookies: Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven. Heat the oven to 350°F. Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment. Working with one log at a time, use a sharp, thin-bladed knife to slice the dough into ¾-inch rounds. Set the rounds about 1 inch apart on the prepared pans and bake until the tops of the cookies feel set, 12 to 14 minutes (don't let the edges become too brown). To ensure even browning, rotate the sheets as needed during baking. Let the baked cookies stand for 1 minute on the pan. While they're still warm, use a thin metal spatula to transfer them to racks. When cool, store between sheets of waxed paper in an airtight container for up to two weeks, or freeze for up to three months.



4 Starting with the edge of the dough closest to you, carefully curl the edge of the dough up and over with your fingertips, so no space is visible in the center of the pinwheel.



5 Using the waxed paper as an aid, continue rolling the dough into a tight cylinder. After the cylinder is formed, roll it back and forth on the counter to slightly elongate it and compact it. Transfer the log to the plastic wrap, centering it on the long edge closest to you. Roll tightly, twisting the ends of the plastic firmly to seal. With your hands on either end of the log, push firmly toward the center to compact the dough. It should be about 9 inches long and 1 1/2 inches thick. Repeat with remaining dough. Refrigerate the logs until firm enough to slice, about 3 hours, or freeze for up to three months.



A childhood favorite, chocolate and vanilla pinwheels are fun to make and to eat.

Carole Walter is a writer and baking teacher. She's the author of several cookbooks, including Great Cookies: Secrets to Sensational Sweets, which won an IACP cookbook award for best baking book. ♦

Plenty of Bar Cookies

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE



While I'll readily admit to being a cookie-baking fool come holiday time, I know that not everyone in the universe is like me. But just about everyone I know does love to *eat* cookies, so for holiday gift-giving, I know just what to do: I make bar cookies. These cookies—baked in a simple 9x13-inch pan and then cut into squares (or rectangles or triangles)—are not only unfussy to make, but they also yield a big batch of pretty and delicious treats.

Each of my three favorite recipes—rich and chocolatey Kahlúa Fudge Bites, chewy Butterscotch Bars, and crumbly Lemon Cornmeal Shortbread Bars—is terrific on its own. But put a few of each together, and you've got a great gift assortment. Just one warning: I don't guarantee that every one of these fun-to-make, irresistible cookies will make it into a gift tin. Each has an interesting flavor twist that makes it familiar yet intriguingly different...and a little too difficult to give away the whole batch. You'll definitely want to save a few for yourself.

for Family and Friends



Nutty Butterscotch & Chocolate Bars

Yields two dozen 2 1/4x2-inch bars.

This cookie goes by many aliases: blondie, golden brownie, congo bar. No matter what you call them, they're butterscotch-flavored, chewy, and loaded with texture.

11 1/4 ounces (2 1/2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon table salt
1/2 pound (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan
1 3/4 cup very firmly packed light brown sugar
2 large eggs
1 1/2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
7 1/2 ounces (1 1/4 cups) semisweet chocolate chips
1 1/4 ounces (1/2 cup) sweetened coconut flakes
4 1/2 ounces (1 cup) medium-finely chopped pecans or walnuts

gift idea

For a friend who likes to bake, why not give the batch of cookies...and the pan, too? While you're at it, give her the recipe as well. For pan sources, see p. 82.

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, and salt to blend. In a large bowl, combine the butter and brown sugar. With a hand-held mixer or a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and brown sugar on medium until very well blended and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Add

the eggs and vanilla and continue to beat on medium until well blended, about another 1 minute. Add the flour mixture and mix on low until just blended, about 1 minute. Pour in the chocolate chips and coconut; mix on low until combined.

Scrape the dough into the prepared pan and spread evenly. Scatter the nuts evenly over the top. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out almost clean with a few moist crumbs clinging to it, about 40 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack and let cool completely. Cut into bars, squares, or triangles. Cover with plastic and store at room temperature for up to two days or freeze for up to one month.

Lemon Cornmeal Shortbread Bars

Yields about forty 2½x1-inch bars.

This shortbread is buttery and fragrant with lemon zest. The texture is chewier than traditional shortbread, and I've added cornmeal for crunch and texture.

9 ounces (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

5 ounces (1 cup) finely ground yellow cornmeal (I use Quaker)

½ teaspoon table salt

¾ pound (1½ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature; more for the pan

7 ounces (1¾ cups) confectioners' sugar

1 tablespoon finely grated lemon zest (I use a Microplane-style zester)

1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease the sides and bottom of a 9x13-inch baking pan. Line the bottom of the pan with the parchment.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, cornmeal, and salt to blend. In a large bowl, combine the butter, confectioners' sugar, lemon zest, and vanilla; with a hand-held electric mixer or a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, beat on medium-high speed until light and creamy, 3 to 4 minutes. Scrape the bowl. Add the flour mixture and mix on low speed until the dough begins to form moist clumps. Dump the dough into the prepared pan.

Using a rubber spatula or lightly floured fingertips, spread the dough into the pan in a smooth, even layer. Dip the tip of a knife or a small metal spatula in flour (to prevent sticking) and score the dough all the way through into bars that measure 1x2½ inches (about 1 inch across the short side and just a smidgen over 2½ inches on the long side). Bake until the tops look dry and golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes. Transfer the pan to a rack. Immediately cut the shortbread into bars, with a metal bench scraper or a knife, using the scored lines as a guide (they will have faded a bit during baking). It's important to do this right after the shortbread comes out of the oven; if you wait until it has cooled, it will crumble when you try to cut it. Let the bars cool completely in the pan before removing them with a small, flexible offset spatula.

make-ahead tip

The shortbread dough can be pressed into the pan, scored, covered, and frozen up to a month before thawing and baking. The baked bars keep, well wrapped, for up to three days at room temperature.



Simple tools give a professional look

One of the advantages of making bar cookies is that you don't need any fancy equipment. Though not essential, a couple of simple tools will make your bar cookies look more professional. For sources, see *Where To Buy It*, p. 82.

- ❖ **Straight-sided 9x13-inch metal pans**, such as those made by Parrish and Doughmakers, are my favorites for baking these cookies. Regular Pyrex pans, with their rounded corners, are fine, but your yield will be smaller because you'll need to trim to get sharp edges.
- ❖ **Small offset spatulas** are great for lifting out squares neatly; I especially like the short, square 2-inch-wide size. For evenly spreading batters and glazes, a 3- or 4-inch-long offset icing spatula is perfect.
- ❖ **Parchment** is great for lining the bottom of the pan—it makes lifting out the bar cookies much easier.
- ❖ **A bench scraper** is the tool I like for cutting bar cookies. Its squared-off shape allows you to see just what you're doing and lets you aim straight down for the cleanest cut.
- ❖ **A ruler** helps you measure, so you get an even and consistent yield if you're making multiple batches.
- ❖ **Toothpicks** are helpful for marking off where you'll need to cut.

Kahlúa Fudge Bites

Yields about 8 dozen 1-inch squares.

These are very chocolatey and rich, which is why I like to cut them into smaller, bite-size squares.

9 ounces (2 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon table salt
¾ pound (1½ cups) unsalted butter; more for the pan
3 ounces (1 cup) unsweetened natural cocoa powder (not Dutch-processed)
3 cups very firmly packed light brown sugar
4 large eggs
2 tablespoons coffee-flavored liqueur (I use Kahlúa) or 1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract

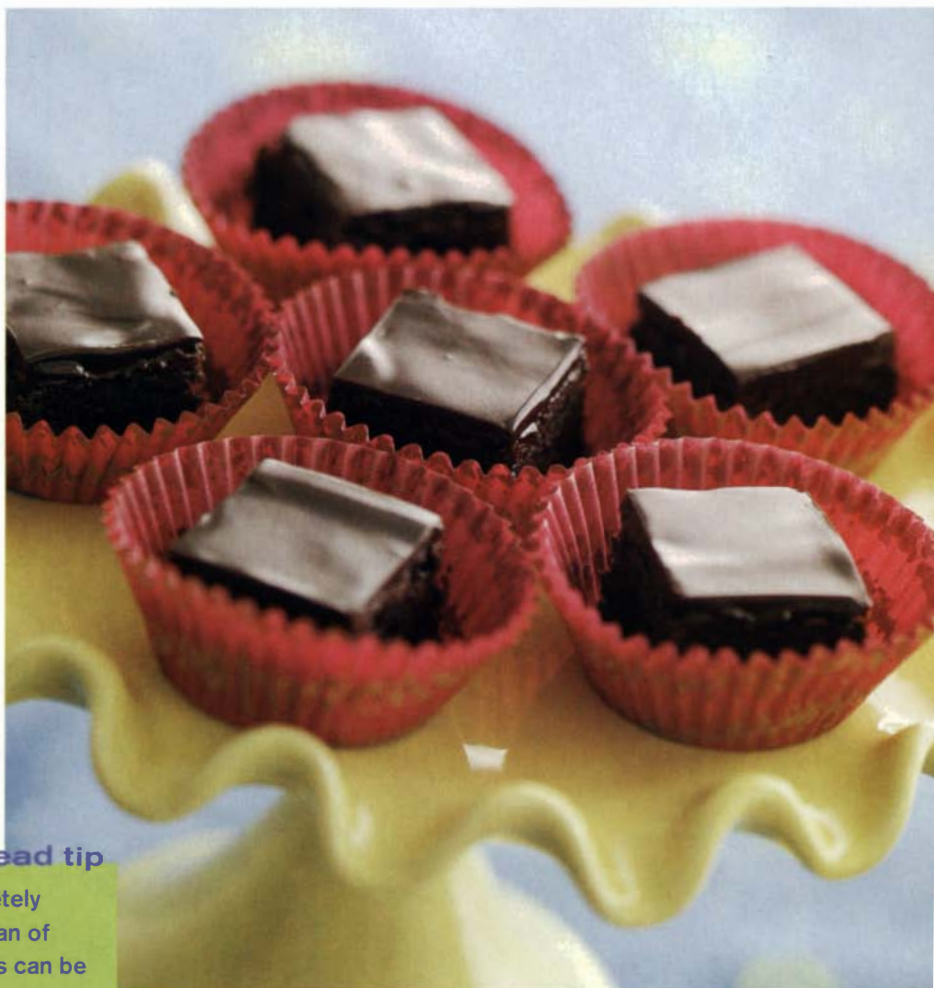
FOR THE GLAZE:

6 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into 6 pieces
1 tablespoon light corn syrup

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 325°F. Lightly grease the bottom and sides of a 9x13-inch baking pan.

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt to blend. Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat, stirring occasionally. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the cocoa powder until smooth. Whisk in the brown sugar until blended. Add the eggs, one at a time, whisking until just blended. Whisk in the coffee liqueur along with the last egg. Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and stir with a rubber spatula until just blended. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and spread it evenly. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with a few small, moist clumps sticking to it, about 30 minutes. (Don't overbake or the squares won't be fudgy.) Transfer the pan to a rack to let cool completely.

Make the chocolate glaze: In a medium bowl, melt the chocolate, butter, and corn syrup in a microwave or over barely simmering water (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 70), whisking until smooth. Pour the glaze onto the center of the cooled, uncut fudge bars. Using an offset spatula, spread the glaze evenly to cover completely. Refrigerate until the glaze is set, about 30 minutes. Cut into 1-inch squares.



make-ahead tip

When completely cooled, the pan of uncut cookies can be covered with plastic and frozen for up to a month before thawing, glazing, and serving. Glazed bars keep for up to four days at room temperature in the pan if covered with plastic wrap.

Wrapping it up

For a special gift, I love to give bar cookies in the pan in which I baked them (see the photo on p. 63), but there are all kinds of other ways to gift-wrap these goodies: in pretty cookie tins, in an oversize coffee cup, in brightly colored takeout containers, or in funky flea-market pottery. Or you can stack them neatly on a cardboard cake round and wrap the whole thing in colorful cellophane. Just use your imagination and, remember, your friends will love the cookies, no matter how they're delivered. For pan and wrap sources, see p. 82.

Abigail Johnson Dodge is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. Her new book, The Weekend Baker, is hot off the press from W. W. Norton. ♦

Warm Chocolate



Choose your favorite combination:
dark chocolate with espresso
or white chocolate with raspberry

Soufflé Cakes

That Make Their Own Sauce

BY ALICE MEDRICH

Who can resist the allure of warm flowing chocolate in, on, or under almost anything? If there's one dessert that brings to mind flowing chocolate, it's the ever-popular molten chocolate cake, which has achieved iconic status on dessert menus.

Baked in individual ramekins and unmolded hot, molten cakes reward us with a gush of heavenly sauce at the plunge of our forks. When they work, these homely little cakes can be a peak chocolate experience. But they can also fail—the “sauce” can disappear if baked a minute too long; the cake can rupture during the unmolding—and when they do, it's maddening.

Recently, I set out to revise the molten chocolate cake concept to make it less tricky, more open to flavor variations, and yet as luxurious as ever. I wanted a moist and delicate cake with a truly melt-in-your-mouth texture, more like a slightly cakey soufflé than a traditional cake. And I wanted a superb bittersweet chocolate sauce to contrast perfectly with the cake. While I was at it, I decided to make a white chocolate version as well.

The first revelation was to serve the dessert in the ramekin in which it's baked, thus eliminating the treacherous unmolding step. No more fiddling with hot ramekins with fingers crossed. It's a relaxed and carefree presentation with a bonus: a relaxed and carefree host.

The antidote for disappearing sauce was less obvious. Many molten cake recipes require split-second timing. You bake the batter until it's perfectly baked around the outside and perfectly underbaked in the center. This is all too perfect for me. A minute too long and the sauce

has turned into cake. A better way to guarantee a pool of sauce is to set a lump of chilled, solidified chocolate sauce in the ramekin before pouring in the batter (see the photo on p. 69). This results in a moist, soufflé-like cake with a warm pool of melted sauce on the bottom. An extra minute or two in the oven isn't going to make or break these cakes.

The separate sauce method also allows for the addition

of flavorings, which led me to the raspberry-chocolate sauce for the white chocolate cake and an espresso sauce for the dark chocolate cake. I've also experimented with an excellent orange-chocolate sauce by replacing the raspberry purée with a little orange juice, orange liqueur, and grated orange zest.

Finally, let me dispel the notion that a recipe with soufflé in its title is scary and difficult. If the S-word gives you visions of Audrey Hepburn's character Sabrina cowering before an imperious chef instructor because her soufflé didn't rise high enough, just listen to this: What “they” don't want you to know is that most chocolate soufflés, and certainly the little soufflé cakes I've created here, are even more

flavorful after they've cooled and deflated slightly. Also, my dark chocolate soufflé cake isn't intended to rise much in the first place. The white chocolate recipe may indeed rise well above the rim of the ramekin (but don't panic if it doesn't), and you can serve it at peak height or purposely wait until it cools a little for fuller flavor. After trying these luxurious little desserts, I think you'll find that I've taken the worry out of producing them at home.



Dip into these light, delicate cakes and discover a warm, flavored chocolate sauce



Make the cakes up to two days ahead

The fully prepared (but not baked) soufflé cakes will hold in the refrigerator for up to two days. Set them on a baking sheet and cover with plastic, or wrap each individual ramekin in plastic.



Dark Chocolate Soufflé Cakes with Espresso-Chocolate Sauce

Serves six.

Softened butter and granulated sugar for the ramekins

FOR THE ESPRESSO-CHOCOLATE SAUCE:

- 1 teaspoon instant espresso powder
- 8 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 3 ounces (6 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into eight pieces
- Table salt

FOR THE SOUFFLÉ CAKES:

- 2 tablespoons unsweetened natural cocoa powder
- 2 large eggs, separated
- 1 large egg white
- ⅓ teaspoon cream of tartar
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar

Put a metal or Pyrex pie plate or cake pan in the freezer to chill. Lightly butter six 6-ounce ramekins or custard cups. Coat with sugar and tap out the excess.

Make the sauce: In a small bowl, combine the espresso powder with 2 tablespoons warm water and stir to dissolve.

In a medium heatproof bowl set in or over a skillet of barely simmering water, melt the choco-

late and butter, stirring frequently, until smooth. Add two pinches of salt, stir, and remove from the heat. Transfer 5 tablespoons of the chocolate mixture to the espresso and stir to blend. (Set the remaining melted chocolate aside.) Use a spatula to scrape the espresso mixture into a puddle on the chilled pie plate or cake pan and return to the freezer until firm, about 10 minutes. When the espresso-chocolate mixture is firm, use a teaspoon to scrape it into six rough balls. Keep the balls on the plate and refrigerate until ready to use.

Make the soufflé cakes: Reheat the remaining chocolate mixture by setting its bowl in or over the skillet of hot water. When it's warm, remove from the heat and whisk in the cocoa and the 2 egg yolks.

In a clean, dry bowl, beat the 3 egg whites and cream of tartar on medium speed in a stand mixer (or on high speed with a hand-held mixer) until the whites mound gently. Gradually beat in the sugar and beat until the whites form medium-stiff peaks when you lift the beaters; the tips should curl over but still look moist, glossy,

and flexible (see the photo above right). With a rubber spatula, fold about one-quarter of the egg whites into the chocolate to lighten it. Scrape the remaining whites into the bowl and gently fold in until blended, taking care not to deflate the whites. Take the chocolate balls out of the refrigerator and put one ball in the center of each ramekin. Divide the batter evenly among the ramekins and level the tops gently with the back of a spoon. You can now heat the oven and bake right away or cover the ramekins with plastic wrap and refrigerate for up to two days.

When you're ready to bake, position a rack in the lower third of the oven; heat the oven to 400°F. Remove the plastic and put the ramekins on a baking sheet. Bake until the soufflé cakes are puffed and possibly a little cracked on top (a toothpick inserted in the center will meet no resistance and emerge mostly clean—the tip will be wet from the sauce at the bottom), 11 to 14 minutes (a minute or two longer if they were chilled overnight). Let cool for a few minutes before serving.

reader review

We asked a *Fine Cooking* reader to give this recipe a real-world test before publication. Here's what he reported:

"I insisted that my guests allow these cakes to rest before eating them. I had to set a timer for the kids. They counted down the minutes, spoons in hand, drooling over the wonderfully aromatic cakes! The chocolate-espresso balance was perfect, and I loved the intense chocolate flavor. I also liked being able to prepare the cakes ahead."

—Steven Bergstein, Hingham, Massachusetts

Reviving overbeaten egg whites

If you've beaten your egg whites properly, they should look like those in the photo at right (medium-stiff peaks whose tips curl when the beaters are lifted). But if you overbeat your egg whites—to the point that they clump instead of blend when you fold them—there is a fix. Here's how it works: First, use a clean spatula to scoop a quarter of the whites into the batter (as directed in the recipe). If



the whites clump badly instead of blend as you fold, beat a fresh egg white into the remaining whites for a few seconds to remoisten them—they won't be perfect, but they should soften up. You can now fold the revived whites into your batter.

The secret to a hidden sauce

Start by pouring a mixture of melted chocolate and butter into a puddle on a pie plate. Freeze until firm and then scoop into six rough balls.



Put one chocolate ball in the center of each ramekin and spoon the batter on top. As the cakes bake, the chocolate melts into a warm, sumptuous sauce.



White Chocolate Soufflé Cakes with Raspberry-Chocolate Sauce

Serves six.

Softened butter and granulated sugar for the ramekins

FOR THE RASPBERRY-CHOCOLATE SAUCE:

- ½ cup fresh raspberries, rinsed, or ¾ cup thawed frozen raspberries**
- 3 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, chopped**
- 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter**
- 1 tablespoon granulated sugar**

FOR THE SOUFFLÉ CAKES:

- 3 large eggs, separated, at room temperature**
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- ⅛ teaspoon table salt**
- ¾ cup whole milk**
- 6 ounces white chocolate (I prefer El Rey or Callebaut), finely chopped**
- ¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- Scant ¼ teaspoon cream of tartar**
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar**

Put a metal or Pyrex pie plate or cake pan in the freezer to chill. Lightly butter six 6-ounce ramekins or custard cups. Coat with sugar and tap out the excess.

Make the sauce: Purée the raspberries in a food processor. Transfer the purée to a fine sieve set over a small bowl. Strain the purée by pressing and scraping with a rubber spatula. Discard the seeds.

In a medium heatproof bowl set in or over a skillet of barely simmering water, combine the chocolate, butter, sugar, and 2 tablespoons of the raspberry purée (save any extra for another use). Stir frequently with a rubber spatula until melted and smooth. Scrape into a puddle on the chilled plate and return to the freezer until firm, 20 to 30 minutes. When the raspberry-chocolate mixture is firm, use a teaspoon to scrape it into six rough balls. Keep the balls on the plate and refrigerate until ready to use.

Make the soufflé cakes: Put the 3 egg yolks in a medium bowl near the stove and have another large, clean bowl at hand. Combine the flour and salt in a small, heavy saucepan. Whisk in just enough of the milk

to make a smooth paste. Whisk in the remaining milk. Set the pan over medium heat and cook, whisking constantly, until the mixture has the consistency of a thick cream sauce, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk about 2 tablespoons of the hot sauce into the yolks to warm them up gently. Scrape the yolks back into the saucepan and cook for a minute or two, whisking constantly, until the mixture becomes a thick pastry cream; it should be about as thick as store-bought mayonnaise. Use a rubber spatula to scrape the pastry cream into the clean bowl. Add the white chocolate and whisk until it's fully melted and incorporated into the warm pastry cream. Stir in the vanilla. Set aside for a few minutes until tepid.

In a clean, dry bowl, beat the egg whites and cream of tartar on medium speed in a stand mixer (or on high with a hand-held mixer) until the whites mound gently. Gradually beat in the sugar and beat until the whites form medium-stiff peaks when you lift the beaters; the tips should curl over but still look moist, glossy, and flexible (see the photo at left). With a rubber spatula, fold about one-quarter of the whites into the white chocolate pastry cream to lighten it. Scrape the remaining whites into the bowl and gently fold in until blended, taking care not to deflate the whites. Take the chocolate balls out of the refrigerator and put one ball in the center of each ramekin. Divide the batter evenly among the ramekins and level the tops gently with the back of a spoon. You can now heat the oven and bake right away or cover the ramekins with plastic and refrigerate for up to two days.

When you're ready to bake, position a rack in the lower third of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Remove the plastic and put the ramekins on a baking sheet. Bake until the cakes are puffed and golden brown on top—they'll quiver when tapped and seem soft in the center, 16 to 18 minutes. Let cool for a few minutes before serving.

Alice Medrich, a chocolate expert, has written several books on the subject. Her most recent is Bittersweet: Recipes and Tales from a Life in Chocolate, which won the IACP Cookbook of the Year award. ♦

BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT

The ovens are cool and dark now, but they ran constantly in the months leading up to this issue as we baked cake after cake and batch upon batch of cookies. Perfectionists that we are, we didn't stop until we knew we had a terrific bunch of recipes for this issue. And along the way, we gathered some great tips and techniques to share with you, like the best ways to melt chocolate or measure ingredients, and how to dress up your desserts with a simple but versatile vanilla sauce. Plus, there's our popular tasting panel—this time we sampled two ingredients that show up surprisingly frequently in holiday baking recipes (and in lunch boxes): peanut butter and red raspberry preserves.

A better way to melt chocolate

Working with so many talented contributors, *Fine Cooking* editors get lots of opportunities to learn new things. I recently learned that the old adage for melting chocolate—always over, never in, simmering water—doesn't necessarily hold true. Chocolate expert Alice Medrich points out that putting a metal bowlful of chopped chocolate in a wide skillet of very hot but not simmering water is better than suspending it over a pot of barely simmering water, double-boiler style, for a very good reason. In a double-boiler setup, you can't see what's going on with the water and it can easily start boiling since it's covered by the bowl of chocolate. Steam is hotter than boiling water, and it can scorch the chocolate if you're not careful. With a bowl of chocolate heating in a few inches of water in a wide skillet, you can see what the water is doing and control the temperature as needed.



Though you might find it fussier than using a water bath, the microwave is also a good tool for melting chocolate. Heat the chocolate on 50% (medium) power for 1 minute and then stir. Continue heating in 15 second intervals, stirring between each interval, until the chocolate melts.

What we mean by:

“butter softened at room temperature”

In the 2004 holiday baking issue, food scientist Shirley Corriher explained that the ideal temperature for butter that's to be creamed with sugar is 68°F or just slightly cooler. If it's warmer, the butterfat starts to melt, leading to a collapse of the air bubbles you're trying to create by creaming. So if you keep your house warmer than 68°F, you really want butter that's a few degrees cooler than room temperature—it should be pliable but still slightly firm, not soft and squishy.

For the slice-and-bake cookies on p. 55, Carole Walter calls for butter to be “slightly softened at room temperature” because she wants to limit the aeration of the butter. In this case, let the butter soften until it makes a slight impression when pressed with a fingertip, but still feels fairly firm. The temperature should be about 58°F.

Tips for melting chocolate

Chop white and milk chocolate finely. White and milk chocolates are delicate; if they get too hot they can get gritty or scorch. Chopping them finely and stirring frequently helps melt them quickly and evenly with minimal heat.

Chop dark chocolate coarsely. It's more forgiving than white or milk chocolate, so chop it into coarse almond-size pieces. It'll take a little longer to melt than if it were finely chopped, but it means less knife work up front, and less frequent stirring.

Watch out for water. Unless you're melting chocolate along with a significant amount of water or another ingredient like butter or cream, just a few drops of water (like what might be in a wet bowl) can make the chocolate seize into an unworkable mass. Be sure that all the tools that come in contact with the chocolate are bone-dry before you start, and don't cover melting chocolate (condensation from the lid might drip into the chocolate).



Royal icing spruces up cookies

Royal icing, which hardens to a glossy, smooth finish, is ideal for decorating cookies like the gingerbread cookies on p. 86D. Royal icing can be made with raw egg whites or with meringue powder (egg whites that have been heated to kill bacteria, dried, and powdered; also called powdered egg whites). Since raw egg whites can, in very rare instances, contain salmonella, the powder is the safest choice. Both of the recipes below make a fairly stiff mixture that's ideal for piping with a decorating tip. After you pipe outlines, you can thin the remaining icing slightly with water to make icing "paint" for filling in outlines with a brush. For sources for meringue powder and gel paste food coloring, see p. 82.

Royal Icing with Egg Whites

Yields about 3 cups.

**1 pound (4¼ cups)
confectioners' sugar,
sifted**
3 large egg whites
**½ teaspoon cream of
tartar**

Royal Icing with Meringue Powder

Yields about 3 cups.

**1 pound (4¼ cups)
confectioners' sugar,
sifted**
**3 tablespoons meringue
powder**
**6 tablespoons warm
water**

To prepare either recipe, combine all the ingredients in a large bowl and mix (with a hand-held or stand mixer) on low speed until blended. Increase the speed to medium and beat until the icing holds thick, soft peaks, 4 to 6 minutes. Test the icing for outline

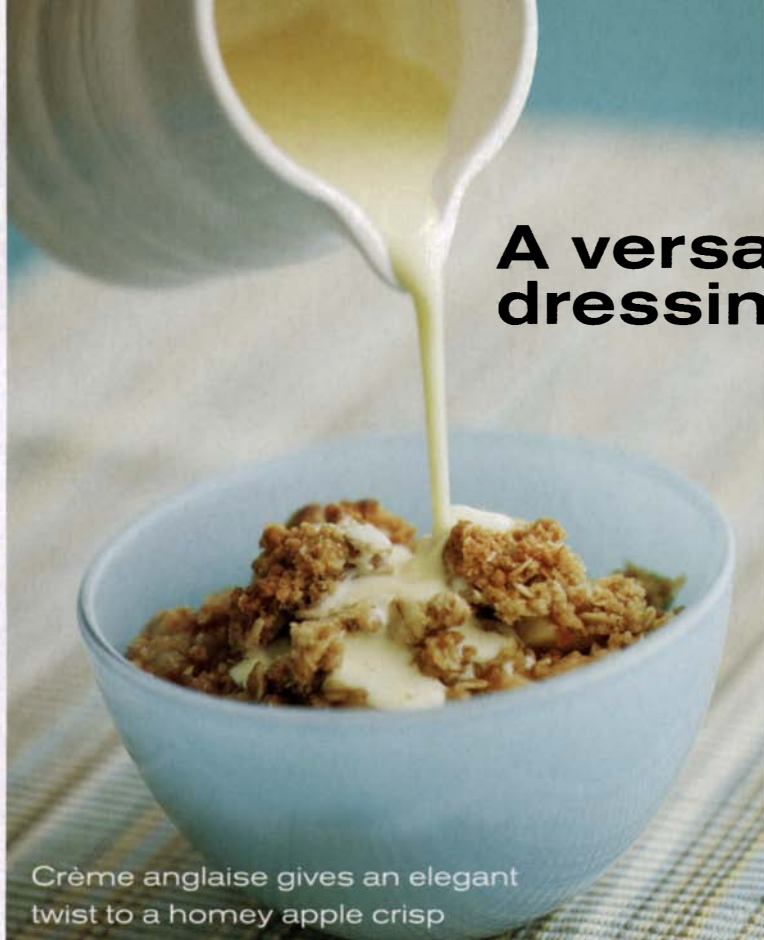
consistency by piping a small amount through a decorative tip. If it tends to curl back or is difficult to pipe out, add a few drops of water. If the piped icing seems runny, add confectioners' sugar, a tablespoon at a time, beating on low speed to blend. Don't overbeat or the icing will stiffen and lose its gloss. Divide the icing among clean containers, one for each color to be used. Tint as you like with food coloring gel pastes (liquid colors can thin the icing too much). Add each color by dipping a toothpick into the paste and transferring small amounts to the icing; stir with a spoon until no streaks remain. Keep the containers sealed when not working with them. Discard any icing that isn't used the same day it's made.

—from *Fine Cooking* #54

Fun thing: Bears & bread keep brown sugar moist

Unless brown sugar is stored truly airtight, it will harden over time and become impossible to work with. There are lots of little tricks for keeping the sugar moist, like adding an orange or apple peel to the sugar, or a crust of bread (that's the one my mother taught me). But lately I've been using a little reusable terra cotta brown sugar bear. Once soaked in water, it will keep brown sugar moist for about three months. Check your local kitchen-supply shop, or see p. 82 for mail-order sources.





Crème anglaise gives an elegant twist to a homey apple crisp

technique class

A versatile sauce for dressing up desserts

One of the first things I learned in culinary school is the concept of “mother sauces”—base sauces, like Hollandaise or tomato sauce, that with the addition of a few ingredients become a big family of related but different sauces. In the pastry kitchen, crème anglaise is a mother sauce that’s used to accompany all sorts of desserts, like flourless chocolate cake, meringues, pound cake, soufflés, poached fruit, and fruit crisps. If you freeze crème anglaise, it becomes ice cream. Culinary school aside, I’ve grown to really appreciate this versatile sauce,

(Continued on p. 74)

Crème Anglaise (Vanilla Custard Sauce)

Yields 1¾ to 2 cups.

Recipes for crème anglaise vary quite a bit in their proportions of milk, cream, eggs, and sugar (some use no cream at all). This is our favorite because it’s neither too rich nor too milky, and it’s thickened enough without tasting too eggy.

1¼ cups whole milk
¾ cup heavy cream
⅛ teaspoon table salt
⅓ cup granulated sugar
1 vanilla bean
4 large egg yolks

Combine the milk, cream, salt, and about half of the sugar in a heavy-based saucepan that holds at least 2 quarts. Split the vanilla bean lengthwise and scrape out the seeds. Add both the seeds and the bean to the milk mixture. Bring just to a simmer over medium-high heat. Remove from the heat and let steep for 15 min-

utes, stirring frequently to keep a skin from forming.

Fill a large bowl with a few inches of ice water. Have ready a smaller metal bowl that will fit into the ice-water bowl, and a fine sieve. Reheat the milk mixture over medium-low heat until hot but not simmering. Meanwhile, in a medium heatproof bowl, whisk together the yolks and the remaining sugar. When the milk is hot, whisk about ½ cup into the yolks, and then whisk the yolk mixture back into the milk. Cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until the sauce thickens ever so slightly and passes the spoon test (see the photos at right). The temperature should be about 175°F. Immediately strain the sauce into the waiting metal bowl and set the bowl in the ice bath. Stir occasionally until the sauce is cool. Press a piece of plastic wrap directly onto the surface of the sauce (to prevent a skin from forming), and refrigerate for up to three days.



When first combined, the sauce is too thin to coat the back of a spoon dipped into the sauce.



Once it’s cooked long enough, the sauce thickens just enough to coat the back of the spoon and hold a line drawn through it with a finger.

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which can be used as is, or flavored in lots of different ways.

Egg yolk, meet milk

Also known as vanilla sauce or vanilla custard sauce, *crème anglaise* (pronounced krehm ahn-GLEHZ) is a lightly thickened concoction of milk, cream, sugar, vanilla, and egg yolks. As simple as it sounds, there's skill and technique involved in cooking the sauce so the egg yolks thicken without curdling. Yolks begin to set around 150° to 155°F. Adding sugar raises the coagulation temperature, but you still can't just stir the yolks into hot milk. Instead, you use a technique known as tempering, in which you quickly whisk a little of the hot milk into the yolks to gently raise the egg temperature and disperse the yolks into the milk. You can then safely introduce the tempered yolks into the rest of the hot milk. After that, all you need to do is heat the sauce until it thickens a little. As long as you don't go above 180°F, you're home free.

Crème anglaise is used to accompany all sorts of desserts, like flourless chocolate cake, meringues, pound cake, soufflés, poached fruit, and fruit crisps.

Customizing your *crème anglaise*

With the addition of a single ingredient, *crème anglaise* takes on a new identity. In fact, from one batch of *crème anglaise*, you can make several new sauces. Add a little of your favorite flavor extract to taste, or try one of these combinations. The amounts given here are only guidelines; feel free to adjust them to suit your tastes.

For every ½ cup of *crème anglaise*, add:

Raspberry-Vanilla Sauce:

2 tablespoons puréed and strained fresh or frozen raspberries

Hazelnut-Vanilla Sauce:

¾ teaspoon Frangelico (or try another liqueur)

Espresso Sauce:

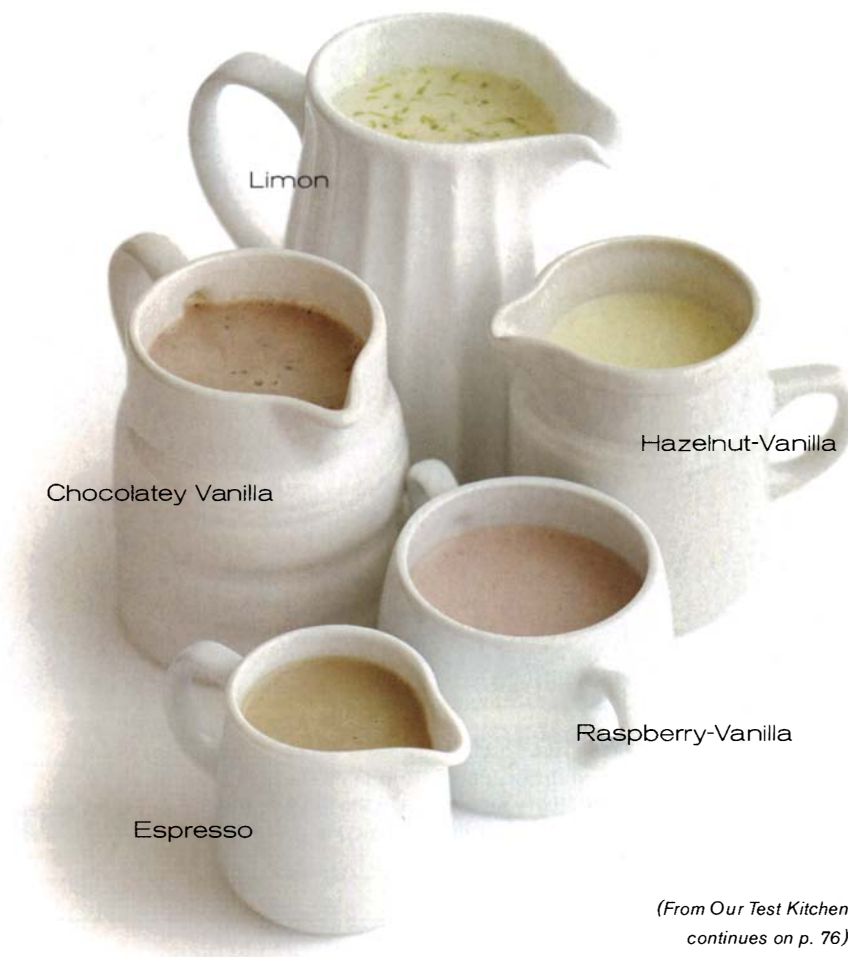
¾ teaspoon instant espresso powder dissolved in ¼ teaspoon warm water

Limon Sauce:

½ teaspoon finely grated mixed lime and lemon zest (or try other citrus zests)

Chocolatey Vanilla Sauce:

½ teaspoon Dutch-processed cocoa



(From Our Test Kitchen
continues on p. 76)

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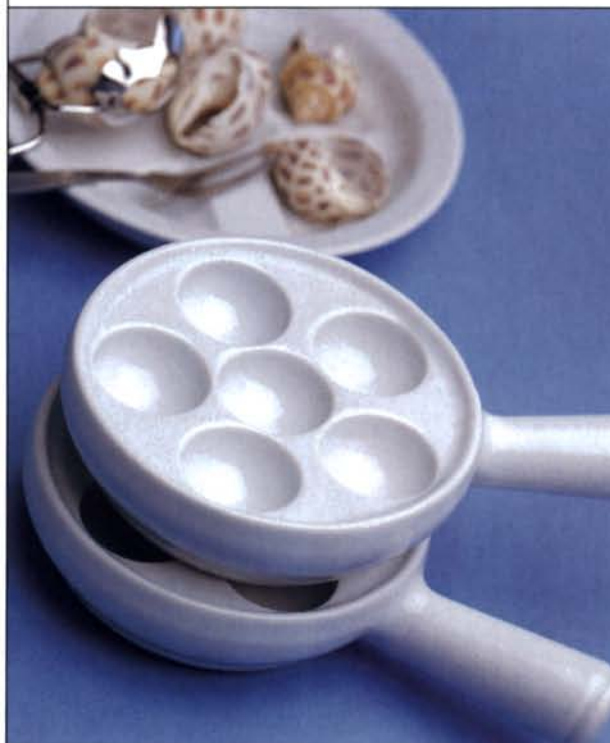
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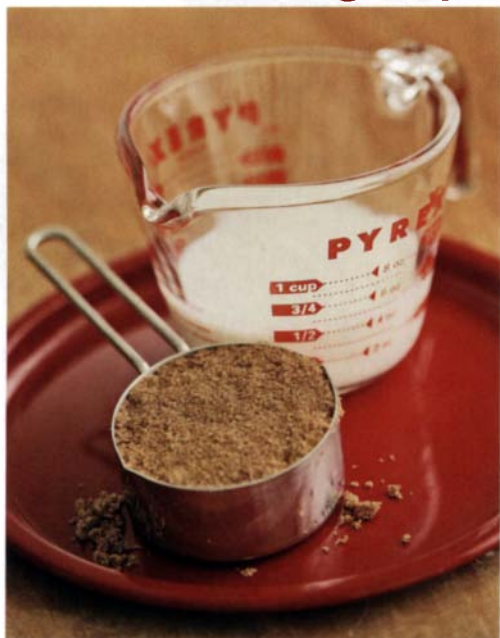
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Dry vs. liquid measuring cups



Some measuring cups are made for measuring dry ingredients, and some are made for liquids. Maybe you already knew this, but if you didn't, it's time to stop using your liquid measuring cup to estimate flour amounts. You can't use one for the other without sacrificing accuracy.

MEASURING TIP: The most accurate way to measure dry ingredients is to weigh them on a scale. If you don't have a scale, spoon the ingredient into your dry measuring cup (as opposed to dipping the cup into the ingredient) before leveling it with a straight edge, like a table knife. You'll get a more consistent result this way.

Check it early, check it often

Lots of variables come into play whenever you bake. Oven performance varies, baking pans are made of different materials, and ingredients differ, too. All these things can cause slight variations in the way batters and doughs behave in the oven, and that's why we give specific doneness clues as well as time ranges in our recipes. Just to be on the safe side, though, it's good to get in the habit of checking on your cakes and cookies a few minutes before the recipe indicates. And once they're getting close to done, check on them often; some baked goods can go from underdone to overdone in a flash.

Your baking powder makes a difference

We recently had a puzzling experience in the test kitchen: A scone recipe worked fine one day, but when we made the exact same recipe again, it had a strange aftertaste. The only difference was that the second batch involved a fresh can of a different brand of baking powder. Intrigued, we decided to do a side-by-side taste test of a few brands of baking powders.

We made scones with Rumford, Calumet, and Davis baking powders, and our results clearly pushed us toward Rumford. The Calumet scones had a notable chemical or metallic aftertaste. The Davis scones had a similar off flavor, though less pronounced. The Rumford scones tasted clean



and free of an aftertaste. It's interesting to note that of the three brands, Rumford is the only one that doesn't contain an aluminum compound (sodium aluminum sulfate), which some bakers say gives baked goods a bitter aftertaste. Whether it's the aluminum compound that caused the flavor defects or something else, we've become loyal to Rumford.

—Sarah Jay, managing editor

tip: Use gravity to remix natural peanut butter

With nothing added to keep it emulsified, the oil in natural peanut butter tends to separate and float to the top of the jar. This is the state in which you usually find natural peanut butter at the market. Stirring the oil back in takes elbow grease, but you can get gravity to do the work for you. When you get the jar home, just turn it upside down and leave it on the counter overnight. Once gravity mixes the oil back in, store the peanut butter in the refrigerator, both to keep it fresh and to solidify the oil so it can't separate as easily.





Why we prefer unbleached flour

In the test kitchen, we use Gold Medal unbleached all-purpose flour for our baked goods (unless a recipe states otherwise) because we like to use products that are as natural as possible. Bleached flour contains additives that whiten the flour and, in some cases, affect its baking properties.

Occasionally, we call for bleached flour when it makes a difference. For instance, we sometimes use cake flour (which is always bleached) because the chlorine that's used to bleach it has an effect on the wheat starch that produces a more finely textured cake.

tasting red raspberry preserves

Store-bought raspberry preserves don't vary much from brand to brand—as far as ingredients go. They contain raspberries, sugar or corn syrup, and usually pectin and citric acid. So when we sampled several popular varieties recently, we were somewhat surprised to discover that each brand had a totally unique personality.

These four were our favorites: Polaner Spreadable Raspberries blew us away with its heady aroma and flavor—just like perfectly ripe, freshly picked berries. Bonne Maman has a soft, syrupy texture and a light tartness that balances the jammy sweetness. Smucker's deep, exceptionally true raspberry flavor is enhanced by a lovely melt-in-your-mouth quality. Hero, the thickest of the bunch, contains just sugar and raspberries, in that order. The berry flavor is good but candylike.

— K. Y. M.


(From Our Test Kitchen continues on p. 80)










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tasting panel

Creamy peanut butter

Considering how much peanut butter we use in recipes and spread on toast around here, we decided to find out which brands we like best. We held a blind tasting of eight widely available creamy peanut butters: four natural peanut butters (which are simply ground peanuts and salt) and four emulsified peanut butters (which contain sweeteners, oils, and ingredients that keep the peanut oil and nut mass from separating). The two types differ enormously in texture and flavor, so we considered them as two separate categories. We evaluated each sample straight from the jar and in a flourless peanut butter cookie. In each category, there was a clear winner that stood out as a cut above the rest.

—*Kimberly Y. Masibay,*
associate editor

Natural creamy peanut butter

Numbered in order of preference; prices may vary.



1 SMUCKER'S NATURAL
\$2.97 for 16 ounces

Smucker's was super-thick, riddled with crunchy peanut bits, and tasted just like roasted, salted peanuts. This "very peanutty" peanut butter made a flavorful but dense, dry, and crisp cookie.



2 TEDDIE OLD FASHIONED
\$2.49 for 16 ounces

Available at supermarkets in the Northeast, Teddie had a pleasing thick, sticky texture, interspersed with lots of peanut bits and a full flavor, reminiscent of "salted peanuts in the shell." It made a crisp, tender cookie with good peanut flavor.



3 PEANUT BUTTER & CO. SMOOTH OPERATOR
\$3.29 for 16 ounces

The palest of the bunch, Smooth Operator had a loose, silky consistency and a sandy texture. Overall, tasters found the flavor a bit flat ("more salt, please") and not particularly peanutty. But it did make a nice, crisp cookie.



4 ARROWHEAD MILLS VALENCIA
\$3.99 for 18 ounces

The gummy texture of this organic peanut butter didn't appeal to us straight off the spoon, nor did the raw (as opposed to roasted) peanut flavor, but the cookie made with this brand had such a fine tender crumb that all was almost forgiven.

Emulsified creamy peanut butter

Numbered in order of preference; prices may vary.



1 JIF
\$2.69 for 18 ounces

Jif ranked first with all but two of our tasters. Tasters liked the creamy, pleasantly sticky mouth feel—"the way peanut butter should be"—and praised the balance of saltiness to brown-sugary sweetness. Too bad the roasty peanut flavor was muted in the cookie.



2 SKIPPY
\$2.19 for 18 ounces

The salty-sweet flavor of this super thick, slightly oily peanut butter struck a chord with tasters who grew up eating this brand. In its raw state, the peanut flavor was decent, but it kept a very low profile in the cookie.



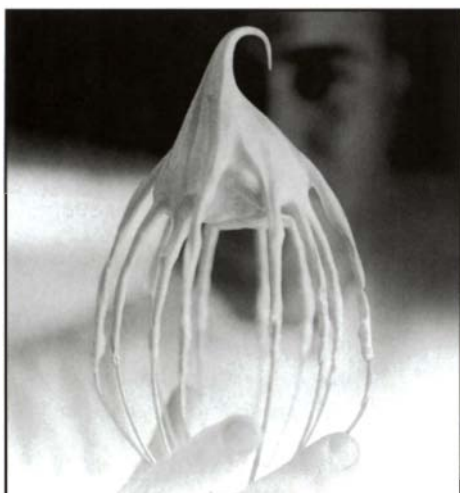
3 REESE'S
\$2.15 for 18 ounces

This silky, sweet peanut butter wasn't especially nutty, but its molasses undertones and salty finish reminded some tasters of peanut-flavored candy. In the cookie, that molasses flavor came through, but not much peanutiness did.



4 PETER PAN
\$2.18 for 18 ounces

This peanut butter had a fun, sticky mouth feel, but it left behind a shortening-like greasiness, and salt was the lingering flavor impression. It made a bland-tasting, tender, and crumbly cookie.



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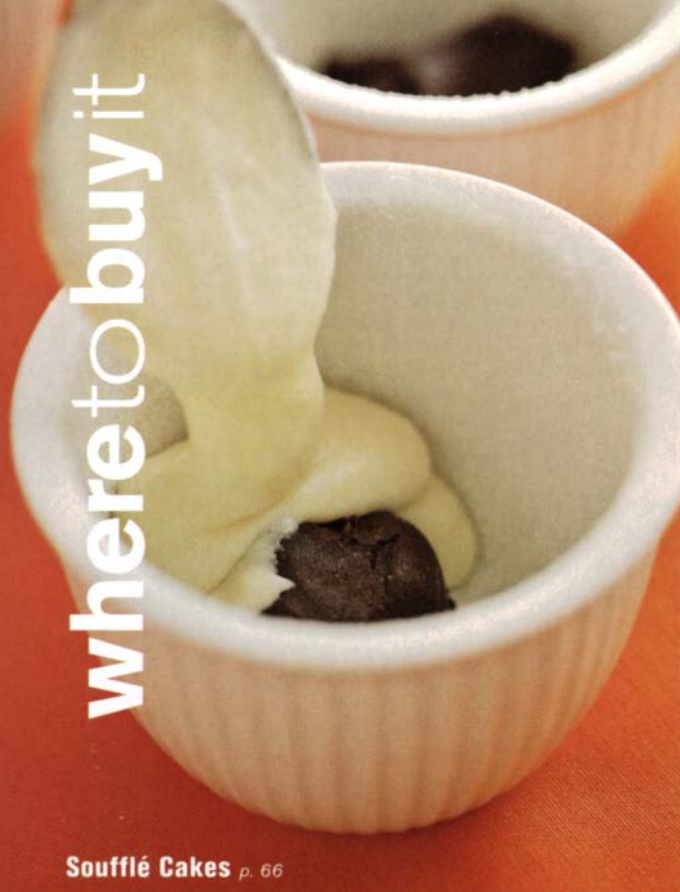
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Soufflé Cakes p. 66

The 6-ounce ribbed porcelain custard cups shown on p. 67 can be found at Sur La Table (866 328-5412; surlatable.com), where a set of four sells for \$9.95.

To order good-quality white and dark chocolate like Callebaut and El Rey, try Chocosphere (877-992-4626; chocosphere.com).

Crystallized ginger for the Double-Ginger Pumpkin Tart on p. 52 is sold in well-stocked supermarkets. For a mail-order source, go to Gingerpeople.com (800-551-5284).



Colorful takeout containers, available at The Container Store (www.containerstore.com; 888-266-8246), are perfect for packing up cookies.

Slice & Bake Cookies p. 55

For heavy-duty rimmed baking sheets, look to The Baker's Catalogue (800-827-6836; bakerscatalogue.com), where half sheet pans sell for \$17.95.

Stylish Tarts p. 50

Fluted tart pans with removable bottoms are available in many kitchen stores, but you can also find them online at Bridge Kitchenware (212-688-4220; bridgekitchenware.com); the 9½-inch size is \$6.50. The site also carries a range of long, thin metal spatulas, useful for removing tarts from their pans.

Bar Cookies p. 62

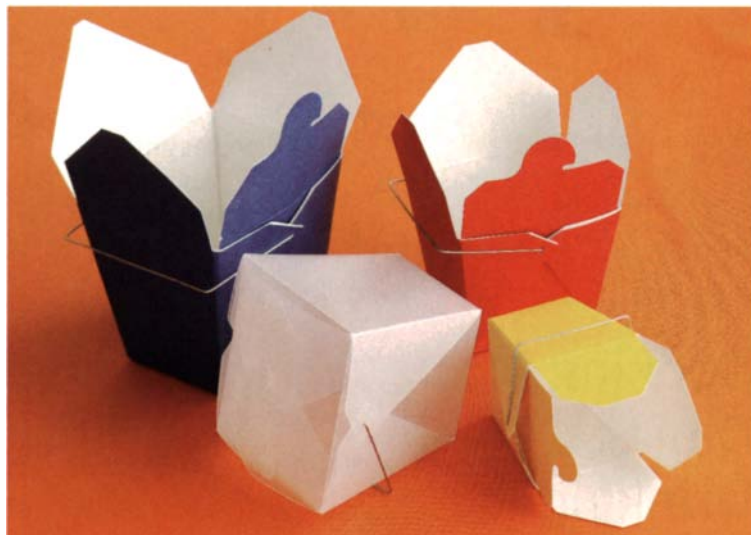
For making bar cookies, we like heavy-duty, straight sided, rectangular metal baking pans. Parrish brand pans are good ones to try; they're sold for \$15.95 at Broadway Panhandler (866-266-5927). There, you'll also find parchment for \$5.95, a range of offset spatulas, including a 4½-inch Ateco offset icing spatula for \$2.50, and bench scrapers (also called dough scrapers) for cutting bar cookies that range from \$4.50 to \$6.95.

For creative presentation, pack your bar cookies in colorful

takeout containers. The Container Store (888-266-8246; www.containerstore.com) carries several styles (from 39¢). Contact Sweet Celebrations (800-328-6722; www.sweetc.com) for cardboard cake rounds in several sizes. This company carries square and rectangular cake cardboards as well.

Ingredient: Baking with Buttermilk p. 22

Saco Cultured Buttermilk Blend, the powdered form of buttermilk, is available in some supermarkets. If you don't see it, call Saco at 800-373-7226 to find out if you're in the distribution area. You can also order it directly from





Snowflake-shaped cookie cutters are sold at Amazon.com

the company; it's \$7 for a 16-ounce can or \$11 for two cans.

To make Carolyn Weil's Cranberry Streusel Pound Cake, try a Chicago Metallic Commercial 8½x4½-inch loaf pan (\$11.99), available at Linens n' Things (866-568-7378; www.lint.com). For a Chicago Metallic nonstick 8½x4½-inch loaf pan (\$14.95), go to Kitchen Emporium (888-858-7920; kitchenemporium.com).



From Our Test Kitchen p. 70

Amazon.com carries the snowflake-shaped cookie cutters pictured above for \$7.31 per set. There, you can also find Deb El Just Whites powdered egg whites (\$18 for three 3-ounce canisters), which are perfect for making royal icing (it's also available in most super-markets), and a twelve-color kit of Ateco food coloring gel pastes for \$15.95.

Brown sugar bears (also known as brown sugar softeners) are \$2.99 at Complements to the Chef (complementstothechef.com; 800-895-2433).

If your local grocery store doesn't stock Rumford baking powder, you can order it from The Baker's Catalogue (800-827-6836; bakerscatalogue.com).

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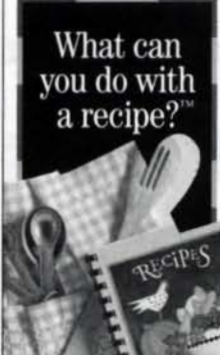
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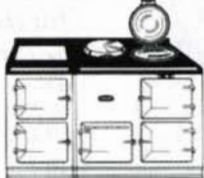
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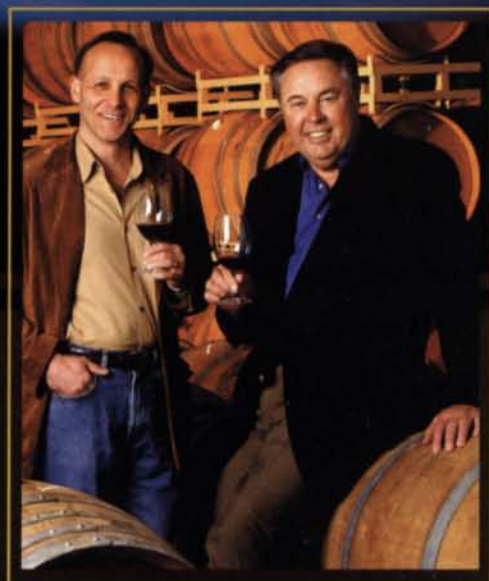


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43



18



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classiccookies

BY JOANNE CHANG

A sweet holiday gift

At my bakery, Flour, we sell cookies year-round, but during the holiday season, people clamor for them in droves. We just shape them a little smaller, wrap them in cellophane, and tie them with festive ribbon.

These tear-out recipe cards feature some of my favorite cookies, from chocolate chunk and peanut butter to snickerdoodles and gingerbread. The recipes are very simple; each contains ten or fewer ingredients, and the dough for each can be prepared in advance and stored in the refrigerator for up to a week. Once the cookies are baked, you can also freeze them, well wrapped, for up to two weeks.

Chocolate-Chunk Cookies



Peanut Butter Cookies



Gingerbread Cookies



Chocolate-Chunk Cookies

Yields about forty cookies.

- 9½ oz. (2 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- ½ tsp. table salt**
- ½ lb. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature**
- ¾ cup granulated sugar**
- ¾ cup plus 2 Tbs. very firmly packed light brown sugar**
- 2 large eggs**
- ½ tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- 9 oz. bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped**
- 2½ oz. milk chocolate, coarsely chopped**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, and salt to blend. Using a stand mixer with a paddle attachment, beat the butter, sugar, and brown sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. Beat in the eggs and vanilla

until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. With the mixer on low speed, slowly blend in the flour until incorporated, about 30 seconds. Fold in the chopped chocolate by hand with the spatula, making sure all the flour and butter are thoroughly combined.

Drop the dough by rounded tablespoonfuls about 3 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake until the cookies are golden brown on the edges and slightly soft in the center, about 15 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three days.

Gingerbread Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen 4-inch-tall gingerbread people.

- 14¼ oz. (3 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 2 tsp. ground cinnamon**
- 2 tsp. ground ginger**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- ½ tsp. ground cloves**
- ½ tsp. table salt**
- ¾ lb. (1½ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature**
- 1 cup very firmly packed light brown sugar**
- ¼ cup molasses**
- 1 large egg**

Sift together the flour, cinnamon, ginger, baking soda, cloves, and salt. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat the butter, brown sugar, and molasses on medium until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. Beat in the egg until thoroughly combined. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. With the mixer on low speed, slowly add the

flour until blended. Divide the dough, wrap each half in plastic, and chill until firm enough to roll, about 1 hour.

Position a rack in the center of the oven; heat the oven to 350°F. Lay each piece of dough between two long sheets of parchment or waxed paper. If the dough is very firm, let it sit until pliable. Roll it to about ⅛ inch thick. Peel off the top layer of paper and cut out cookies with a cookie cutter. Put the sheet of dough in the freezer for a few minutes until the dough firms enough to easily transfer the cutouts to ungreased cookie sheets (space them about 2 inches apart). Gather and reroll the scraps. Bake until the edges are golden brown, 10 to 12 minutes. Let cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring the cookies to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for three to four days.

Tips for evenly baked cookies

- ❖ Be sure that unbaked cookies are all about the same size or rolled to an even thickness; that way, they'll all finish baking around the same time.
- ❖ Use cookie sheets, not rimmed baking pans. Unrimmed sheets allow better air circulation around the cookies while they're in the oven.
- ❖ Be sure to use heavy-duty cookie sheets that won't warp. If the sheets warp, your cookies will slide around and bake unevenly.
- ❖ Bake cookies one sheet at a time, unless you're using a convection oven. If the dough doesn't fit onto one cookie sheet, drop the remaining batter onto a second sheet and bake it after the first batch comes out of the oven. If you're re-using cookie sheets, be sure to let them cool down before putting more dough on them.

Peanut Butter Cookies

Yields 4½ dozen cookies.

- 13 oz. (2¾ cups plus 1 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 1 tsp. baking soda**
- ½ lb. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature**
- 1 cup granulated sugar**
- 1 cup very firmly packed light brown sugar**
- 2 large eggs**
- 1 lb. (1¾ cups) smooth peanut butter (I prefer Skippy or Jif)**
- ¼ tsp. pure vanilla extract**
- ½ cup salted peanuts, chopped**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Sift together the flour and baking soda. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat the butter, sugar, and brown sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, 4 to 5 minutes. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. Beat in the eggs until thoroughly

combined, 1 to 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. Beat in the peanut butter and vanilla until blended, about 1 minute. Scrape the bowl again. With the mixer on low speed, slowly add the flour until incorporated, about 30 seconds. Mix in the peanuts.

Drop the dough by rounded tablespoonfuls about 3 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets and flatten each cookie slightly with the palm of your hand. Using the tines of a table fork, make a criss-cross pattern on top of each cookie. Bake until the cookies are golden brown on the edges and slightly soft in the center, 15 to 18 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three days.

Vanilla Sugar Cookies



Double Chocolate Cookies



Pecan Thumbprint Jam Cookies



Snickerdoodle Cookies



Double Chocolate Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen cookies.

5 oz. unsweetened chocolate, chopped
8 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
¼ lb. (½ cup) unsalted butter, cut into four pieces
4 large eggs
1½ cups granulated sugar
¼ tsp. pure vanilla extract
2½ oz. (½ cup plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. table salt
3 oz. (¾ cup) walnuts, toasted and chopped

Melt the unsweetened chocolate, 4 oz. of the bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, and the butter in a small saucepan over low heat (or in a bowl in the microwave) and set aside to cool slightly.

Using a stand mixer with the whisk attachment on medium-high speed, whip the eggs and sugar until thick and light, about 10 minutes. With the mixer on low speed, add

the melted chocolate mixture and the vanilla and mix until blended.

With a rubber spatula, fold in the flour, baking powder, and salt and scrape the bowl. Fold in the remaining chopped chocolate and the walnuts. Refrigerate the dough until it has firmed up enough to scoop, about 1½ hours.

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Drop the chilled dough by rounded tablespoonfuls about 3 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Bake until the cookies are cracked on top and feel dry on the surface but still soft inside, about 15 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three days or frozen for about one month.

Snickerdoodle Cookies

Yields about 3 dozen cookies.

12 oz. (2⅔ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. table salt
2 tsp. cream of tartar
½ lb. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1¾ cups granulated sugar
2 large eggs
2 Tbs. ground cinnamon

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking soda, salt, and cream of tartar to blend. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and 1½ cups of the sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. Beat in the eggs until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. With the mixer on low speed, slowly

blend in the flour until incorporated, about 30 seconds.

In a small bowl, mix the cinnamon and remaining ¼ cup sugar. Drop the dough by rounded tablespoonfuls into the cinnamon sugar and roll around to coat. Set the coated balls of dough about 3 inches apart on greased cookie sheets. Bake until golden brown on the edges and slightly soft in the center, 15 to 18 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three days or frozen for a month.

Vanilla Sugar Cookies

Yields about 2 dozen cookies.

8½ oz. (1¾ cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. table salt
½ lb. (1 cup) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
1 cup granulated sugar; more for coating
1 large egg
½ tsp. pure vanilla extract

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt to blend. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment or a hand-held mixer, beat the butter and sugar on medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. Beat in the egg and vanilla until thoroughly combined, about 2 minutes. Scrape the bowl again. With the mixer on low speed, slowly blend in the flour until incorporated, about 30 seconds.

Drop the dough by rounded tablespoonfuls into a bowl of granulated sugar and roll to coat; then set the coated balls about 3 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets.

Bake until the cookies are golden brown on the edges and slightly soft in the center, 15 to 18 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to three days.

Note: Be sure to bake these cookies on a cookie sheet, not a rimmed baking sheet; otherwise, the dough will spread too much, and the cookies won't retain a nice, round shape.

Pecan Thumbprint Jam Cookies

Yields about 4 dozen cookies.

14¼ oz. (3 cups plus 2 Tbs.) unbleached all-purpose flour
½ tsp. table salt
¾ lb. (1½ cups) unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
6 oz. (1½ cups) pecans, toasted and finely ground in a food processor
3 oz. (1 cup) confectioners' sugar
2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
½ to ¾ cup red raspberry preserves with seeds

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. In a medium bowl, whisk the flour and salt to blend. Using a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, beat the butter and pecans on medium speed until very soft and light, about 3 minutes. Beat in the confectioners' sugar and vanilla until thoroughly combined, about 1 min-

ute. Scrape the bowl with a rubber spatula. With the mixer on low speed, slowly blend in the flour until totally incorporated, about 30 seconds.

Using your hands, roll the dough into 1- to 1¼-inch balls and set them about 2 inches apart on ungreased cookie sheets. Press your thumb into the middle of each dough ball to create a well for the preserves. Stir the preserves to loosen and then spoon about ½ tsp. into the middle of each dough ball. Bake until the cookies are golden brown, about 20 minutes. Let the cookies cool on the sheet for 1 minute before transferring them to a rack to cool.

The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for three to four days.